

# THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

*Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 43.

Price, Five Cents.



BY  
W.B. LAWSON

"IT'S JESS!" THOUGHT STAR. BOTH REVOLVERS SPOKE, AND THE MAN WHO WAS APPROACHING FELL LIKE A LOG.



# THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

## A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

*Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1902, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 43.

NEW YORK, March 1, 1902.

Price Five Cents.

# JESSE JAMES SURROUNDED:

OR,

## The Desperate Stand at Cutthroat Ranch.

By W. B. LAWSON.

### CHAPTER I.

#### JESSIE JAMES IN DISGUISE.

It was close upon sundown, and a group of men had assembled around a pile of timber in the yard of a ranch house, in Humboldt county, California.

The spot was known as Dark Cañon, but the cañon proper was a mile away, while the ranch stood on ground almost as level as a table.

Seated upon the timber was a heavily-built man, whose only point of difference from the others was that he carried no weapons.

This face in itself told the story of the man's position—he had been caught in some evil act and was being held a captive.

"Reckon, now, yer kin name ther son-of-a-gun Pete Sanders! I 'low yer've been longest in this hyar section," spoke up Lem Snyder, one of the punchers from the ranch, after ejecting a quid of tobacco.

Pete Sanders, an old man of seventy, took a seat on the timber, close to the sullen individual, and looked him over critically before he answered:

"Yer right, Lem! I 'low I've been in ther cañon er good while, but this hyar skulkin' vagabond is er leetle too much fer my mem'ry! I've been er thinkin' like er house afire, but I 'low I can't place him!"

"What's ther good of identifyin' him, pardners?" spoke up a brawny ranchman from Tehama county. "The skunk was ketched snoopin' in ther corral, and everybody in this hyar section knows what thet means! Ther chap is er thief, an' thet thar's enough ter know erbout him."

"Hold on, Jim Fifer! Snoopin' ain't no sin in this hyar cañon! Ther feller has got ter be off ther premises with ther beast! I reckon we're a leetle ahead of yer on ther law an' order question, Fifer. Tehama's behind ther times! Haw! Haw! Better move ercross ther bound'ry an' be civilized—hey, pardner!"



The last speaker was a man of some importance in Humboldt county, inasmuch as he had long since constituted himself judge and jury for that particular section and was looked up to as a man of something like phenomenal education.

Even the prisoner raised his head and stared at him as he spoke. It was the first sign of interest he had shown in the proceedings since he was surprised in Joel Palmer's corral that morning at daybreak.

The man who was both ranchman and legal luminary noticed the respect with which his words had been greeted, and promptly scrambled up to the top of the pile of timber.

He was a man of short stature, but enormous "breadth of beam," so that when he finally reached the position above his companions' heads he was obliged to wait a minute and do some rapid puffing.

"Fatty is in his element now! Hold your breath, Dick! Here comes a burst of eloquence!" whispered a good-looking young "tenderfoot" to the youth who was standing near him.

The young fellow, a boy of eighteen, smiled broadly in reply, and then both glanced involuntarily at the face of the man on trial.

"Gee! There's something familiar about him, Duke! It's strange I can't place him!" whispered the younger of the two, softly. "Rack your brains, old man! We've surely seen a man with eyes like his somewhere! Jiminy! They're as cold as steel and as sharp as gimlets!"

"I'd give my boots if Star was here," said the other, cautiously.

"Sh! Don't breathe that name aloud! Our friend is not without fame in this country! It's lucky for us we are not so well known! Ha! ha! Wonder how long we'd have stayed in Dark Cañon if the natives had known our business!"

"Not long," whispered the other, and then stopped to listen, for the legal light of the county had begun his harangue.

This was done after the conspicuous use of a red bandana and a copious inhalation of air, that swelled the speaker up like a bullfrog.

"Gents an' feller-citizens of this hyar hole called Dark Cañon, as well as them as comes from neighborin' counties! Bein' as how I am ther judge of this hyar section,

by common consent an' pussonal infloence, I hereby take upon myself ther dooty of purtectin' this hyar rascal until he's been proved guilty, a thing I 'low thet won't be hard ter do if somethin' ain't er comin' purty doggoned quick ter appease ther hunger of justice!"

There was a murmur of applause as the short-winded magistrate paused for breath, and then the two youngest men in the crowd exchanged a word with each other.

"He takes it cool! Seems to be a trifle amused, in fact! Too bad the sinner has such a crop of whiskers! I'll bet the expression of his mouth just this minute would be a revelation."

"Those whiskers are false! I'm sure of it! Thunder! What wouldn't I give to jerk them off and see what's under them! Still, we can't be bothering about all the horse thieves in California when we are out here on the track of one particular person!"

"I ain't so sure we are on his track, old man! Jesse James is making for the Northwest, according to all reports and——"

"And you and I have got to think up some excuse to quit prospecting and get after him, Dick! That fellow Star is all right, of course, but——"

"There you go again! Do be careful, Duke! There's no sense in queering a man just because he belongs to a rival agency! All I want in the world is a fair field and no favor, and our Chicago friends will give us that! In fact, I fancy we hold better cards than they do at the present stage of the game!"

"That's right! Our friends are over the boundary still! Laid up for repairs, they tell me. Hello! Whiskers has got a cramp, I guess! Just observe 'the way he is gripping his left shoulder!"

Dick Pendleton looked and saw a spasm of pain cross their prisoner's face, while a brawny hand was moving to and fro over the fellow's muscular shoulder.

"An old wound, probably," began Duke Horton.

His sentence was cut short by another harangue from the orator.

"Now, then, friends an' feller-citizens, ther question is right hyar! Did ther prisoner yonder steal er critter or not? Ef he did, I 'low we'll know what ter do with him! Ef he didn't, then I reckon er couple er hundred will squar' ther deal, inasmuch as ther's er law in this hyar section thet makes er thief pay fer his evil intentions!"



"A jim-dandy law! Who framed it, judge?" called Dick Pendleton.

A broad smile widened the judge's expansive countenance.

"Reckon thet thar is what would be called the law of emergencies! It's er impromptoo, an' thet thar's the beauty of law, in my oopenyon! Indervidoal law ter suit indervidoal cases! I reckon thet thar rulin' has yer endorsement, pardners!"

There was another grunt of approval, and then Pete Sanders offered an amendment.

"I 'low yer'd best wait, jedge, till we see what's in his pockets! This hyar one on this side is er bulgin' almighty suspicious! Ef we should find now thet it was filled with nuggets, I 'low it would alter the amount yer jest named, an' I move er committee be app'inted ter investigate the afor'said!"

"Reckon I'll second thet thar motion, an' I 'low yer'd best carry it quick, judge!" remarked Lem Snyder, as he took a step toward the silent prisoner, with his gaze upon the bulging pocket.

"Thet thar is good law, pardners, an' I agree ter it!" answered the old judge, promptly. "Thar ain't no price will pay fer evil inclinations, an' it's jest as well ter set an example! Thet thar's our bounden duty, pards! We've got ter be allers an' forever er settin' examples."

He scrambled down as he spoke, and hurried around the timber, so as to be close at hand when the contents of the pocket were divulged, but just as he struck the ground there came an interruption in the proceedings.

A group of horsemen had stolen across the lots, keeping directly behind the ranch house, and just as the women inside came to the door, yelling like so many Indians, the riders dashed around the house and leveled their weapons.

"Hands up, ther hull lot of yer! Move a muscle and ye are dead men!" ordered a thunderous voice, and the words were accompanied by the ominous click of triggers.

Instantly every man in the group around the timber raised his arms above his head, the two young detectives following their example promptly.

As they did so they watched a peculiar maneuver.

The horsemen, who numbered fourteen, divided in three sections, each turning and facing in different directions.

This left two odd men, one of which was leading an

Arabian thoroughbred by the bridle, and these two advanced promptly to the side of the prisoner.

A dozen people, men and women, had come running from behind the various buildings, but they were met at each point by four businesslike-looking rifles.

The prisoner leaped upon the back of the thoroughbred, and some one handed him a pistol.

The next second his voice rang out like the blast of a bugle.

"Disarm the pack of fools, and let's be off at once, partners! Ha! ha! The judge's eloquence has saved my life! The old toad little knew how I was counting the minutes!"

Instantly the two extra men were obeying his order, and every man around the timber was shorn of his revolver.

"Now stop that fellow's mouth yonder!" went on the bold speaker, as he pointed to a cowboy near the door of the ranch house, who was yelling like an Indian.

There was the sharp crack of a weapon, and the fellow took to his heels, with one hand over his ear.

This scene was greeted with a burst of laughter; then the group of riders wheeled swiftly and dashed away as they came.

They were hardly lost to sight in the trees bordering the lot behind the ranch house when another clatter of hoofs was heard, and three young men, mounted upon jaded horses, galloped up the cañon from another direction.

"Where is he?" shouted the leader of the trio as he saw the group. "We are from the marshal's office, and are after an outlaw!"

The group beside the timber presented a sorry spectacle, but as the riders came nearer Dick Pendleton let out a low cry of amazement.

"By thunder! It's Star! The jig is up, Horton! I hope to Heaven the boys don't know us!"

Duke Horton came to the front with unusual alacrity and let out what sounded like a genuine yell of pleasure.

"Snakes and crocodiles, men! Why weren't you a minute sooner? We've just been held up by a whole gang of outlaws, and to think we've had one of 'em in our clutches ever since daybreak!"

"What did he look like? The leader, I mean?" asked the first rider, again.



He slipped from his saddle as he spoke, and winked at his companions, the wink being intended to warn them not to dispute his story.

"He was a giant, with shoulders like an ox and eyes as hard as a grindstone! Had on a red flannel shirt, gray trousers, and wore a set of patriarch's whiskers," answered Pendleton, promptly.

There was a cry of disappointment, and the trio looked at each other.

They knew the description of this man by heart, for they were three of the cleverest detectives from the great Pinkerton agency.

"You've been a lot of chumps, then," growled the leader, whose name was Will Star. "That fellow was Jesse James, the noted outlaw, and his friends were the James gang, the worst cutthroat crew in the United States at present!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE DETECTIVES MEET RIVALS.

"That settles it, Duke! Keep mum, old man!" whispered Dick Pendleton, softly. "The boys don't know us in these rigs, and I confess I'm glad of it. The idea of our having our bird in our hands and not even knowing it!"

"Bosh! Star has had the same luck himself, I'll bet on it!" muttered Duke. "That rascal could fool the devil! Hang the judge! Why couldn't he have shut up and let us have our own way! We'd have lynched the scamp at daylight if it hadn't been for his interference."

"Better keep dark for a time, anyhow," urged Pendleton, again. "Give St. Louis a show! Those Chicago fellows will only crow over us, and, besides, I've no notion of dividing the reward. Ten thousand dollars about now would come in mighty handy!"

"That's so," muttered Duke, as he moved over nearer the trio, who since Star's announcement had been consulting in undertones.

"We caught the fellow in the corral," he explained a little meekly. "He hadn't stolen any of the cattle, but, of course, his presence there was suspicious. We'd have hung him, sure, if it hadn't been for Fatty, yonder! He's a judge or something, so, of course, he's hot for law and order!"

"He had a good subject to practice on when he began

with Jesse James," remarked Star, sarcastically. "Here we've been hunting that fellow all over the country, and this is the sort of thing that has been going on ever since we started! We corner the rascal and he slips through our fingers! I'm beginning to think the devil helps him."

The group of natives had drawn nearer now, and were standing about, with dejected expressions on their faces.

"Who owns this place?" asked one of the other Pinkerton men, as he, too, dropped from the saddle to relieve the tired creature he was riding.

Joel Palmer, a man of forty, with muscles like iron, raised his head sheepishly.

"Reckon I do, stranger," he said, slowly; "I'll call Jed ter water yer horses right away! Consarn it! I feel as mean as er coyote over what's jest happened! Ter think thet thar was Jess James, ther wust cutthroat in creation!"

"No use to cry over spilt milk," remarked the detective, whose name was Fred Stacy. "It ain't the first time that Jess has held the winning hand, partner! Give the horses some feed and a proper rest, if you will, then, if there's anything in your larder, we'll pay you well for it! Twenty miles in the saddle is enough for the present, I reckon."

He glanced at Star as he spoke, and the detective nodded his head.

"We'll stay here for a while—that is, if we can be accommodated," was the answer; then a significant glance was exchanged between them.

Joel Palmer was only too glad to have some pretense for leaving the group, and as he and Lem Snyder led the horses away the judge pulled out his red bandana and wiped his eyes.

"It's ther fust time I ever lost er case, feller-citizens," he said, in a whimper; "I 'low, now, thet thar was er case thet thar ain't no law fer! I'd orter hev acted faster an' done ther talkin' afterwards! Thet thar comes of tryin' ter 'give ther devil his due' an' set er example fer law an' order when tain't needed!"

"Thet thar's erbout ther size of it, judge. Yer've called ther turn!" remarked the ranchman from Tehama county, exultingly. "Better come over ther border, jedge, an' see how we do them thar things! Why, we run thet thar scoundrel out er Tehama neck-an'-heels less'n er month ago! He'd er wrecked ther express an'



corralled half er million ef we hadn't! Haw! haw! Thar warn't no words over thet thar play, pardners! We jest showed thet thar rascal thet he warn't wanted in'ther county! Thar ain't no county thet's so chock full o' fighters as Tehama, I reckon, an' thet thar's ther only law an' order thet goes in our section!"

Will Star was eying the man all the time he was talking, and when the fellow was through he burst out laughing.

"I'll be darned if it ain't Corrigan!" he blurted out. "Hello! So you're taking all the credit of that deal, are you? Ha! ha! I reckon you've forgotten that I had to bribe you to help me save that girl, Bessie Wilders! You'd have taken the outlaw's money as quick as you took mine, you scamp, only I happened to get to the roadhouse first! You're a dandy rogue, to be talking law and order!"

The man who had called himself Jim Fifer hung his head for a minute, but he recovered when he saw that the judge had wandered off and had not heard it.

"Reckon I've a right to change my name when I change my biz," he said, defiantly; "I'm a rancher now, an' I reckon ther new name is er purtection. Thar's those thet ain't got no pleasant feelin's ter speak of fer Corrigan."

"Jesse James is one of that number! Look out for him!" laughed Star, as he started for the ranch house.

Fred Stacy followed him, talking to Dick Pendleton about the outlaw, but Duke Horton and the third Pinkerton man stood for a moment together.

"You're a strange specimen for this section, stranger! Did you sprout, drop down or blow over?" asked the sleuth of Horton.

The detective from a rival agency at St. Louis smiled good-naturedly as he answered:

"Blew over, I guess. I'm from Missouri, stranger. My chum and I are roughing it a bit. We've got adventurous spirits and all that sort of thing; besides, there's something worth having up yonder in the mountains."

He jerked his thumb toward the distant range that swept the horizon, and the Pinkerton man took a sharp scrutiny of his features.

"Duke Horton, and I'll bet on it," was the thought that flashed through his mind; then he had to bite his lips to keep from bursting out laughing.

"Do you think Jess will be apt to honor us with another

call? I've got a watch and some dust that I'd hate to part with," went on Horton.

Howard Lent, the third Pinkerton man, was able to laugh naturally at the question, and as his feelings were relieved thereby he answered, pleasantly:

"If that's all there is on the ranch worth stealing, I venture to say he won't come back. If there's more, say a few thousand in dust or nuggets, and any fine horse-flesh on the place, I wouldn't want to gamble on his movements."

He watched Horton's face shrewdly as he spoke, and saw the young man start a little.

What else he would have observed could not be told at that minute, for Horton had heard his name called in a familiar voice, and turned, with flushed cheeks, to answer the summons.

"Miss Palmer, the old man's daughter," he muttered, as a sort of explanation to Lent, as he moved away.

The young girl was as pretty as a picture, and came toward him smilingly, but even Lent, who saw her now for the first time, could tell that she was nervous.

"Wasn't it awful?" she began, and then Horton promptly put his arm around her and led her away, leaving Lent the only man in the yard, except a puncher, who still sat on the timber.

"Well, I'll be blowed! The fellow has made good headway!" muttered Lent to himself. "Those two chaps haven't been here more than a week at best, and I'll be hanged if the girl isn't in love with him already!"

Will Star came out of the house at that minute and glanced at the lovers as they turned an angle of the house, and then he and Lent had a word together.

"What did you learn, old man?" asked the cleverest detective of the great Chicago agency.

"That our rival in St. Louis has a couple of men in the field. Those two tenderfeet are Duke Horton and Dick Pendleton, Star! Now, how the devil are we going to get rid of them?"

Star gave a low whistle, that indicated surprise.

He had been so busy with the natives that he had paid no attention to the two "tenderfeet."

"We could manage Duke all right—he's not over clever," he began. "But Pendleton is a corker! He's as smart as a steel trap. We've got a double game on our hands, old man, and don't you forget it!"



"You think Jess will come back?"

"Sure! And before morning, too, I reckon!"

"How would it do to double up with the boys?"

"What! and divide the ten thousand?"

Lent laughed a little dolefully.

"We've been after that ten thousand some time now, Star, and it seems to be as far away as ever!"

"We'll get it to-night! Brace up, old man! There's a bag of nuggets inside that are worth a small fortune! I got it straight from headquarters, so I know I am right, and you can bet Jess won't leave the county without making a try for it."

"You think that was what he was here for this morning?"

"Sure! He was getting the lay of the land, and sizing up the enemy! It's my opinion he got himself nabbed on purpose. He knew his men were coming and trusted to luck. Gee! It makes me tired when I think how near we came to him!"

"It's one on our rivals! Ha! ha! No wonder they don't want us to know them!"

Jed Ford, a cowboy on the place, came around the corner just then, and Lent went to talk with him about caring for the horses.

The judge shuffled off to the corral, which was some distance from the house, and Star, who wanted to think a little, moved over to the timber.

The cowboy who had been seated there gave him a curious look, and then promptly got up and started for the stables.

"What the deuce ails you? I don't bite!" remarked Star, laughing.

"Reckon, now, I do, sometimes—thet is if I'm riled, stranger!" was the answer.

Star gave him a sharp look, but continued to smile good-naturedly.

"Hem! Don't try it on me, that's all I've got to say! I'm not hankering for a case of hydrophobia!" he said, coolly.

The fellow stopped short, and glared at him a second, then he seemed to think better of it and went on to the stables.

As quick as a flash, Star drew a handful of photographs from his pocket and looked them over.

"Jerusalem! The scamp is one of the James gang!"

he muttered. "By the jumping wildcats! We're in it this time for certain!"

He was still thinking deeply when Corrigan, or Fifer, as he called himself, came out of the ranch house.

The minute he saw Star he strode over to the timber.

"See hyar, stranger!" he began. "I reckulect thet thar deal at ther roadhouse as well as you do, I reckon. 'Pears ter me you was frum our sheriff's office then, an' now yer 'low yer came straight frum ther United States marshal!"

"Well, what of it?" asked Star, calmly. "A man changes employers now and then, I reckon, but I don't have to change my name, because I'm in a legitimate business!"

Corrigan's face grew purple, and he commenced to bluster.

"Hold on!" ordered the detective, who did not want any row. "Just go easy, Bill Corrigan, or I'll put the hooks into you! I've got orders from the marshal to nab every horse thief in California, and——"

Corrigan did not wait to hear more, but bolted for the stable.

A minute later he and the judge rode down the cañon together.

They were followed by three others, who had been in the group, which left no one about the ranch except its regular occupants and the newcomers.

Star was just starting for the house, when Lent came back with their host, still talking about the horses.

"The beasts will never be good for much. Reckon yer've tuckered 'em out," Joel Palmer was saying.

"I've got an animal I'd like to show you, Mr. Palmer," said Lent, with a wink at Star. "It's a stallion by the name of Star King; perhaps you've heard of it!"

"By the eternals! Yer don't mean ther critter thet Jess James used ter own?"

"That's the beast, Mr. Palmer!"

The ranchman eyed his guest for half-a-minute.

"I stole the beast, of course," explained Lent, coolly. "We overhauled him while Jess was running away from us back yonder in the foothills. Unfortunately, the stallion wrenched his shoulder right away, and even now he isn't fit for the work we want of him."

"Where is ther critter now?" asked the ranchman, shrewdly.

"He'll be here before morning, if nothing happens,"



chimed in Star. "Another of the marshal's men is due in this section and we've got to wait for him to get our instructions."

"Recken yer after Jess, ain't yer?" asked Palmer again.

The fellow that Star had just identified as one of the James gang stepped out of the stable at that minute, and by the look on his face Star knew he had heard the question.

"We're after every criminal in the country," he said, decidedly. "There's been millions of complaints, and the government is sick of 'em! We're out here to help corral the rascals, and we expect every honest man in California to help us!"

He had his eyes on his host's face as he spoke, and was observing his expression.

"Then I reckon ye've come ter the right place, pardner," said Palmer, with a good deal of bluster. "I'm an honest man, an' this hyar's an honest ranch, stranger! Thar's nuthin' wuth stealin' around ther place exceptin' ther live stock, an' I reckon thet thar didn't suit Jess, or he'd er made off with it this mornin'. Cuss ther sinner! I low I'll riddle him with buckshot if I ever set eyes on him!"

He turned to lead the way to the kitchen, and the two detectives looked at each other.

In spite of their host's bluster, they had their own opinions.

### CHAPTER III.

#### JOEL PALMER IN TROUBLE.

When Star reached the living room of the ranch house, he saw something that surprised him.

Miss Palmer had turned her back on Horton, and was talking gaily with Fred Stacy, who was an unusually handsome fellow. Horton was trying to be indifferent, and was devoting himself to another of the ranchman's daughters, a girl of sixteen, who had red hair and freckles.

"Whew! This is bad!" was Star's first thought. "It makes us rivals in more ways than one, but it will give us a bit of fun to mix in with our fighting."

He sauntered over by the fireplace and seated himself in a chair, after bowing politely to the ladies present.

The rest of the household trooped in after a minute, and Lent took a chair on the opposite side of the wide fireplace.

Five minutes later supper was announced, and Mrs. Palmer, a scrawny woman with sharp features, motioned them to seats at the table. When they were all in their places Star glanced around critically, and while the others did the talking he formed a few conclusions.

"Palmer is a scamp! That's as plain as the nose on his face. The fellow is too big a thief himself to allow another thief on the place. Wonder what he would say if he knew that one of Jesse James' spies was living under his roof this minute?"

He glanced at the ranchman as this thought flashed through his mind, and could detect a very uneasy expression on the man's stolid features.

"Reckon yer'd best bolt ther door, young man!" remarked Palmer, at that minute, and Dick Pendleton rose promptly to obey the suggestion.

"Why, Joel! What's thet thar fer? It's hotter'n ginger inside!" said Mrs. Palmer, irritably.

"Reckon now it 'ud be hotter ef that thar cussed robber should come back," said her husband, gruffly. "I low ther skunk has got his eye on somethin'—if it ain't ther horses, it must be ther gals hyar!"

There was a feminine shriek at this, and Mrs. Palmer's brow cleared promptly.

A moment later she was laying the law down to her daughters.

"Don't let me ketch yer off'n ther premises ter-night—nuther one of yer! We ain't got no money—yer dad nor me—ter pay thet thar rascal fer returnin' of yer!"

Nell Palmer, the older and prettier of the two, began pouting promptly.

"I reckon I'll be taken care of if I do go, ma. You needn't worry a mite. Jess James nor no man is goin' ter steal me, I reckon. I'll have ter say 'yes' afore they'll take me fur, I'll venture."

She glanced at Stacy as he spoke, and giggled merrily.

It was a clean case of transferred affection, and Horton was growing green with jealousy.

Lent and Dick Pendleton did some sparring, and Star threw in a word now and then, but the meal ended without one guessing the other's secret. They imagined that their disguises were as yet impenetrable.

When Star got the old man's ear again he began talking up the stallion, and by nine o'clock the ranchman was



ready for a dicker, but before it was concluded he had to see the creature.

Star and Lent consulted a minute, and finally made a proposition. It was that Lent should escort Palmer, or whoever he chose to represent him, and Dick Pendleton to where the stallion was, as the fourth member of their party might decide to remain in hiding until some hour near morning.

The object of the detectives was to get rid of Pendleton, even if in so doing they had to reduce their own numbers.

But when the suggestion was made, the young detective balked stubbornly. The result was that Horton and Jed accompanied Lent, and Star was left with nearly as big a proposition on his hands as ever.

A half-an-hour after Lent departed there was a clatter of hoofs in the yard and Joel Palmer took his pistol in his hand and went out to investigate. Star bit his lips to keep from laughing, and Stacy actually turned his eyes from Miss Palmer's face to give him a glance of amusement.

"Snakes an' crocodiles! Ther scamps hev missed calculations!" roared Palmer from the doorway. "Ef hyar ain't thet thar stallion I'll eat my hat! Come out hyar, young man, an' clap an eye on ther critter!" Star was already at the door, shaking hands with a fine-looking fellow.

He introduced him by another name, but it was Ned Ray, a clever detective.

Ray listened quietly while Palmer cursed the "luck," as he called it, and then the stallion was stabled and Ray was given some supper.

Under pretext of wanting to stretch his legs after a day in the saddle, Star left the house and crept softly toward the stable.

Just as he had expected, the member of the James gang was in there.

He was examining the stallion, and cursing in an undertone.

"He recognizes the beast, all right, which means that Jess will know of it before morning, and it will be one more incentive for him to visit the premises," thought Star. Then he decided that "he who hesitates is lost," and seeing the key in the padlock, he closed the door on the fellow and locked it.

There was a roar of rage, but the detective walked away coolly.

Ten feet from the stable he came face to face with Palmer.

"Hello!" he began, in his natural voice. Then, as he saw the ranchman's face, he added an explanation: "That beast is too valuable to be left in the care of an outlaw, Mr. Palmer," he said, sternly. "Of course, you don't know it, but you have an enemy in the camp. That galoot in the stable is Three-Toed Charlie! He belongs to the James gang, and that was why Jess was here this morning. The fellow has told him there was something here worth stealing."

If the world had suddenly come to an end the ranchman could not have shown more surprise.

He began to stammer, and shake all over, as if the news had shocked him for some reason or other.

Star saw his opportunity, and followed it up determinedly.

"I'm talking facts, Mr. Palmer. So you may as well listen calmly. That fellow in there would have been off in another minute, and we'd have lost the beast, and I'll venture to say there's not another like him in California. Now, then, it's for you to put that fellow in irons. Either that or a bullet—there is no alternative. Then if you have any gold around the place, you'd——"

"Thar ain't er dollar! I swear it!" roared Palmer, excitedly. "I'm er poor man, stranger, exceptin' fer ther live stock, an' thet thar's a good ways frum market as yit. No knowin' how many of ther critters I'll lose afore I find er buyer."

"Take care of them, then, and the way to do it is by letting me have a look at the punchers at once!" said Star, firmly.

The ranchman thought for a minute, and his shrewdness returned in a measure, but before he had fairly decided what to do, Star laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"The marshal's heard of you, Joel Palmer," he said, in a stern whisper. "You'd better make a clean breast of it, partner. There's a reason why this ranch should be a lodestone for robbers, and you ain't gaining anything by keeping silence!"

This was enough for Palmer, and he began to bluster.

He cursed the marshal and all the sheriffs, and even the governor, and then gave the three shrill whistles that



called his punchers together. They could hear their prisoner kicking on the stable door from where they stood, so Star hurried the ranchman round the corner of the house to a sort of woodshed. Nine men came running up with weapons in their hands, and Mrs. Palmer and the two girls poked their heads out of the windows.

Pendleton was out like a flash, with Ray at his heels, but when Tracy attempted to follow Nell Palmer held onto him.

"You must stay and protect us! Oh! I am sure it is robbers!" she cried, hysterically.

Tracy had already opened the door, and was standing in the doorway, and just as the girl leaned towards him Horton and Lent galloped up with Jed behind them.

"What is it, old man?" asked Star, as he caught sight of Horton.

"Our plans have failed! We were attacked!" began Lent.

The next moment he pitched forward and fell from the saddle.

Star sprang to his side, and Horton dropped from the saddle.

His face was as white as death, and his teeth were chattering.

"Hang the curs! They fired on us from ambush! We could not pass, so we had to come back, and such a ride! I'm nearly jounced to a jelly!"

He caught a glimpse of Miss Palmer in Stacy's arms at that minute, and with a groan of disgust turned his back upon them.

The cowboys took the horses and tied them under the shed.

They were starting for the stables, but the ranchman stopped them.

"Who do yer reckon ther cusses was, Jed?" he asked, anxiously.

The cowboy cleared his throat, but finally answered:

"They was thieves, I reckon, an' they took us fer ther same. I 'low if I'd er spoke fust, this hyar wouldn't hev happened!"

"Ha! ha! So they know you, do they? That looks as if you had two rascals on the place, instead of one, Mr. Palmer!" said Star, in a loud voice.

"I 'low Jed's er fool not ter talk what he means," began the ranchman.

The men had carried Lent inside, and Jed and Horton

were following, so Star stepped in front of the ranchman, and lowered his voice a little:

"I know who those rascals were, Joel Palmer," he said, sternly. "They are a gang of horse thieves from Washington Territory, and they have private business with you. You need not deny it!"

"Reckon now, yer kin name ther bizness, sence yer so knowin'!" growled Palmer.

"I will! They're bringing you the creatures that they have stolen from the various stock farms hereabouts, and you are going to pay 'em for the beasts out of your bag of nuggets!"

Star hissed the last three words, and the ranchman staggered.

It was the first inkling he had had that his guest knew his secrets.

"You stole those nuggets from a poor devil of a miner who was journeying across California last month," went on Star, slowly. "You plugged him full of lead and took his gold in return. Now, can you think of any reason why Jesse James came here this morning?"

The ranchman was silenced.

He saw that his guest knew him thoroughly.

Moreover, he began to fear that he was the object of their visit, and the thought made him shake until he resembled a man with palsy.

"I'm not after you, Joel Palmer, although the marshal told me to keep an eye on you," said Star, quickly, "but while I'm here I'm going to undo the wrong you have done. I am going to return what's left of that bag to your victim's daughter."

"Hush! Fer God's sake!" groaned Palmer, as his wife appeared in the doorway. "Don't let her hear yer, stranger; nor ther gal, nuther! Come erlong to ther stable, an' let's talk ther thing over."

"Not much, Joel Palmer! What I've got to say can be said out here. I'm not trusting myself in close quarters with a murderer!"

Joel Palmer growled like a tiger, and his teeth snapped together.

"Call the men inside—every mother's son of them!" went on Star, sternly. "It's the only way to protect the stallion till I want him. No danger of Jess coming back as long as that other cutthroat crew is hanging around. I suppose they took our friends here for the James gang."



Joel Palmer was still growling, and did not answer, so Star took him by the arm, and shook him a little.

"Call the men, I say! I want to see them inside!" he ordered, savagely.

Palmer managed to stop snarling long enough to give the signal, and the men, who were talking in groups around the yard, hurried back to the kitchen.

Star was the last man to cross the threshold, and as he entered he winked at Stacy.

Instantly the detective ignored Miss Palmer's presence, and darted out, pausing by Star just long enough to get an order.

"What's ther meanin' of this, Joel?" asked Mrs. Palmer, as the men trooped in. "Sakes alive! A body would think ther chap was dead an' yer'd all come ter ther funeral, when he's only got er scratch, an' will soon be as lively as er cricket."

Star got a look at his companion. His color had come back and he was sitting easily in the low chair, the bandage around his left arm showing the location of his injury.

Star had his back against the door as soon as it was closed, and was eying the group of punchers sharply.

Joel Palmer was looking so glum that the men stared for a minute, until Star had finished his inspection and was ready to express an opinion.

"An honest crew, Joel Palmer!" he began, decidedly. "That feliow outside is the only rascal on the premises. Now, men, I have a little something to tell you."

"Go easy, stranger. These hyar chaps know me, I reckon, so lies won't go! If yer've got anything ter tell, yer'd best think twice afore yer say it. I 'low, ther man thet slanders Joel Palmer won't get off none too easy!"

"How about the man who tells the truth about him? Remember, I have my proofs, Joel Palmer," remarked Star, coolly.

Nell Palmer had left the room by an inner door before Star answered, and as her mother had been watching for just such a movement, she promptly followed her.

This left only Alice, the second daughter, to hear what was coming, and as Star gave her a sharp look, he was surprised at her expression.

"By thunder! This tale will be no news to her!" thought Star, as he stared at her. "That girl knows her father's sin! I am absolutely certain of it!"

She was looking at him calmly, but her hands were clasped tightly together.

The detective gave her a sympathetic look, and then went on with his story.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A NIGHT OF TRAGEDY.

"Jesse James was not looking for live stock when he came here this morning, boys! There's something more valuable on the place than the best beast in the corral, I reckon! Jess was here to-day, getting the lay of the land. He means to come back later for your employer's bag of nuggets," he said, briefly.

If a bombshell had exploded in the room the commotion could not have been worse, and every detective present drew and cocked his weapon. Dick Pendleton was standing close to Horton, and during the excitement he whispered to him:

"I told you so, Duke! I was sure the old brute had a bag of gold somewhere! By Jiminy! It didn't take Star long to get onto that fact! It only backs up the theory that he is smarter than chain-lightning!"

"He may have had an inkling of the truth before he came. Listen!"

"There's no use kicking up a row," Star was saying. "Joel Palmer has the stuff in his possession, but it don't belong to him—not a single ounce of it! He lowered the pile a little when he bought those three ye'rlings last week, but there's still enough to be worth saving, and I expect you men to help me restore it to its rightful owner."

Joel Palmer blustered a little, but the clamor of the men suppressed him.

They had seen no wages for three months, so the news that he had a fortune in nuggets in the house turned them into demons.

When Star told them they could not have it, they did not feel much better.

"Listen, men!" cried Star again, "and I'll tell you how to get even. Jesse James is due here again before day-break. Now, if you can inveigle your master's friends—I mean that gang of horse thieves—to come around to the stables and put themselves under cover, Jess might think they had gone, and honor us with a call. It would be a sight worth seeing if they attacked each other! We might wipe out both gangs if we managed it right, and after that we could decide what to do with Palmer!"



"How'd he come by ther gold?" asked the calmest man in the room. "Tell us thet thar, stranger, afore we turn on ther lubber!"

Star glanced at Alice again, and saw that the girl had grown paler, and was having all she could do to restrain her emotion.

"Take Miss Alice to her mother!" said the detective, sternly. "You wouldn't have me break the child's heart, would you?"

Dick Pendleton had offered his arm to Alice almost before Star spoke, but she waved him away, and rose to her feet bravely.

"I knew it all! You need not spare me!" she cried, hysterically. "I knew it that night when I saw him come home, but I held my tongue on account of mother! Oh, father! father! How could you do it?"

Pendleton picked her up bodily, as she buried her face in her handkerchief, and as he carried her from the room, all eyes were on her father.

"Yer'd best own up, pard! We kin all see yer guilty!" muttered Pete Sanders, who was so much older than Palmer that he could risk familiarity.

Palmer had collapsed completely, and while they were waiting for him to speak there was the report of a pistol from the direction of the stable.

"Watch him, Duke Horton! You may be a tenderfoot, but you can handle a pistol, I reckon!" roared Star, as he opened the door and bolted.

"I'll stay with yer, pard!" said one of the cowboys, as the others grabbed their pistols from their belts and darted after the detective.

"Hang it! He knows us! He's known us all the time! Oh, well! I suppose we may as well join forces and share the honors!" said Horton, as Pendleton passed him.

"It looks as though that was about the only alternative! I might have known we couldn't fool Star!" growled Pendleton, as he followed the others.

There were two more reports before Star reached the stable, and when he got there he stood still and stared around in amazement.

"Jerusalem! The rogues have been here!" cried Pendleton, as he joined him.

"Stacy! Whoop! Where are you, old man?" yelled Star, in answer.

There was no reply, and Jed Ford dropped the broken padlock on the first stable door and opened it.

"Look out, men! It's Jesse James! He must have smelled that beast!" cried Star, as he saw the empty stable. "I locked one of his own men inside, and my chum was guarding it, but the stallion is gone, and the nuggets too, probably!"

There was a roar of rage, and the men divided forces.

The night was not dark, and they were soon scouring the premises.

"Does any body know where the dust was hidden?" asked Pendleton. "I was sure there was some, but——"

"This way! Come on, pards! I've got a clue!" cried Ned Ray, at that minute. "There's tracks around the shed that look familiar. You know that thoroughbred that we trailed this morning."

"The one Jess escaped on? I'd know the beast, but not the tracks. Go ahead, Ray, and Star and I will follow! We're partners now! No use keeping up the bluff any longer!"

Star burst out laughing and offered his hand to his rival. Then the three darted around the shed together.

The cowboys, true to their natures, were looking over the live stock first, and had found both the stables and the corral badly depleted, but their cries did not alter the course of the three detectives.

There was a group of buildings used for storing fodder at the left of the rear yard, and the tracks of a single horse, the thoroughbred, led in that direction.

"As like as not, the stuff is hidden under the grain," began Pendleton.

"Palmer always skulked when he was around these buildings! Duke and I were going to investigate, but there was no opportunity."

"Sh! Go easy, boys! I hear some one!" whispered Star, as he darted behind a clump of shrubbery.

The others dropped to the ground, and just then the door of one of the buildings opened and a man stepped out and took a sharp look around him.

"Hurry, Jess! The rascals are after us!" he said, in a low voice.

Star recognized the voice of Three-Toed Charlie, and pressing back the trigger of his weapon, he leaped from behind the bushes.

Crack!

Crack!



Crack!

The detective did not trust to one shot, but emptied three chambers of his weapon.

He found that the pale moonlight might play tricks with his vision. At the same minute he yelled at the top of his lungs for horses.

The man who had given the warning dropped at the first report of Star's pistol, and as the detectives dashed ahead they heard the cowboys yelling to them.

"The stables are empty! There's nothing but mules left!"

Star ground his teeth and darted around the group of buildings, falling over a low wire fence, and wasting two full minutes.

As he finally extricated himself, he heard the sound of hoofs, and some one dashed across the lots in the rear of the building.

"It's Jess! After him, boys!" he yelled.

They all plunged over the fence and came near being shot by their own weapons.

The man who was fleeing from them never turned his head, but leaned low in the saddle and went like the wind.

A second later Star turned an angle of the second building and came full-tilt against a horse.

It was the Arabian thoroughbred, whose tracks they had been following.

"That settles it! Jess has got the stallion!" he cried, with a little tremor in his voice. "This beast was left for that mongrel yonder! Now, where the devil is my friend, Fred Stacy?"

"Reckon we've found him, pard! Thar's no use chasin' thet thar scamp!" called one of the cowboys, who was hurrying towards them. "There's more'n one of them rascals been hyar ter-night! I low we've found er dozen tracks goin' in all directions!"

The men turned and went back without examining the buildings, and Star stifled a gasp of horror as he came upon Stacy.

The poor fellow was lying in a heap behind the first stable. There was a bullet wound in his side, and his face was purple.

"Reckon ther scoundrels choked him arter they'd peppered him!" remarked one of the men. Then they lifted him carefully, and started for the ranch house.

There was very little of value left to protect about the

place, so the punchers followed the detectives back into the kitchen.

Horton and his self-appointed assistant were having very little to do, for Joel Palmer was being prodded with questions by his wife and oldest daughter, who had come in too late to hear much of the story.

Palmer did not raise his head until Star told of Jesse James' visit to the outbuildings. Then the old fellow ground his teeth and clenched his fists savagely.

They laid Stacy on the sofa of pine boards in one corner.

As Lent crept to his side to direct operations, Alice Palmer glided in with her hands full of bandages. One of the punchers, who was skillful in surgery, went to her assistance, and when Star saw that he was not needed, he turned his attention to the next step in the proceedings.

"Reload, boys There's more trouble coming!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when they heard a horse pass the door.

It went like the wind, but they could tell that it carried a rider. At the angle of the house the animal suddenly bolted, then came two sharp cracks from large-calibre weapons.

"Hark! Hurrah! Jess has been headed off by the other gang! They're fighting for that gold, I'll bet on it!" yelled Star, excitedly.

Joel Palmer sprang to his feet and started for the door, but the snap of Horton's pistol hammer made him drop back in his chair limply.

"We'll let them fight it out," went on Star, after he had listened to a lot of signals and the hoofbeats of horses from every direction.

"There's nearly a dozen on both sides, I should judge by the sound! Hark! That's Jesse James, now! He's bawling orders!"

Even Joel Palmer held his breath as he heard the great outlaw's voice. The words came through the logs of the ranch house as though they were only paper.

"Halt! Line up, boys! Now, then, when they clear the angle let 'em have it broadside! It's only a gang of horse-thieves! We'll down 'em in a minute!"

"Don't be so sure, Jess! Haw! haw! Stole er march on ye, ain't we?" roared another voice, and even the detectives could feel their blood thrill at the situation.

The horse thieves had dodged, and were behind Jess now.



The next second their Winchesters poured out a terrific volley.

For a minute nothing could be heard but the crack of firearms, and in the excitement of the minute Star crept through the inner door to Mrs. Palmer's sleeping-room, with but one person seeing him.

His idea was to get up to the roof, and in less than a minute he had found a stairway.

As he crawled up a short ladder that led to an open skylight, he was amazed to find Dick Pendleton behind him.

"Hang it Can't I get rid of the fellow anyhow?" he thought, angrily.

Pendleton settled the question by blurting out, honestly:

"You're a good fellow, Star, and my friend, I hope; but really, now, I can't let you outdo me! If you can shoot Jess from the roof, I feel certain that I can!"

Star had to laugh, and the two crept to the eaves together.

By lying flat on their stomachs, they were able to look over with safety.

Several horses had dashed away riderless, and there were three or four bodies lying upon the ground, and as they watched a trio of riders turned the corner nearest them.

"Outlaws!" whispered Pendleton, "and the James gang at that!"

Star had eyes like an eagle, and did not agree with him, but he shut his lips and said nothing, while Pendleton emptied his pistol.

"That gives me a chance," he muttered, as Pendleton began to reload.

One man had dropped, and the other two dashed away in confusion.

They had decided that two enemies were more than they could stand, and as they could not locate the shots, they retreated promptly.

At that minute another trio swept around the other corner, and Pendleton bit his lips as he recognized the leader.

"It's Jess! By thunder! Why didn't I wait?" he began, at the same time raising his weapon and pulling the trigger.

Star made a swift movement, and knocked the weapon out of his hands.

"Play fair, Pendleton! It's my turn!" he muttered under his breath.

At the same instant he leaned forward directly over his quarry.

"Halt! Hands up, Jesse James! Another step and you're a dead man!" he roared.

The outlaw looked up, and at the same time Star discharged his pistol. There was a yell of pain, and the stallion reared and plunged.

Star leaned farther over the edge and took deliberate aim.

As the trigger fell a rotten board broke under him.

The detective made a lunge at the jagged end, but missed it by an inch.

The next second he plunged down from his high perch, head first.

---

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GIRL FRIEND OF THE OUTLAWS.

Pendleton let out a yell when he saw Star's fate, and the outlaws must have thought for a moment that the house was falling.

Star landed squarely upon the hind quarters of the stallion, as it was plunging ahead, and then slid to the ground, none the worse for his fall, except that he was winded. Pendleton had sense enough to grab his revolver and add a couple more shots, one of which sent an outlaw reeling from his saddle. By the time Star was on his feet there was no one in sight.

Jesse James had not so much as pulled a trigger, but was bending all his energies to putting a good distance between them.

Pendleton hurried back down the ladder, and burst into the kitchen like a cyclone, yelling that Star had been killed, and that the outlaws were defeated.

Every man in the room followed him through the door, except Lent and Stacy and Joel Palmer. Lent was very comfortable now, and held a pistol in his hand, but Stacy was still taxing Alice Palmer's skill to the utmost.

It was fully ten minutes before the men came back, and when they did it was only to bring in two wounded outlaws.

"Bill the Snipe and Hickory Jack," called Ned Ray, as he laid them down on the floor. "Look 'em over, pard, and see what you can do for 'em!"



Jed Ford, who was helping him, did as he was told, and Ray started for the door again, only to meet Star and a cowboy bringing in two more victims.

"The rest are dead! No use bringing them here," said Star, bluntly.

"Reckon thar was lively snappin'! Thar's four dead uns an' four thet's as good as dead," remarked one of the cowboys

Joel Palmer attempted to rise again, but Lent ordered him to be seated.

"Thar's no use your comin' outside, Joel; thar's nuthin' left," said Pete Sanders, as he hobbled in. "I 'low, now, I never reckoned on livin' ter see this day! Thar ain't er piece of horseflesh left on ther ranch thet's wuth thar feed, pardner!"

"Here's proof of Joel Palmer's guilt, men!" called out Horton at that minute, as he came in, holding up a gold nugget half as big as a hen's egg.

"I found this in the outhouse yonder, and there's the place where the bag was hidden! Hang Jess! He's not only stolen a dozen good horses, but he's got that gold now, and that's the last we'll ever see of it!"

"I'm not so sure! I mean to follow the knave!" said Star, promptly. "There are four good horses out there that will do for our party! Stacy and Lent will have to remain here for a while, and one of you fellows must be responsible for Palmer! I'll show him what mercy I can, on account of the women, but——"

"What's Joel done?" asked Mrs. Palmer, in a shrill voice.

"Never you mind, mother! Just come here and help me with this bandage!" called Alice, sharply.

"I reckon ye kin leave Joel in my charge, pardners," said old Pete Sanders, slowly; "I 'low I'm sorry to hyar ther feller has been tricky! I've knowed Joel some time, and beyond thet he's a leetle mite stingy, I ain't got nuthin' agin him, spite of the fact thet he kin come by live stock over night, as ye mout say!"

"Thet thar allus bothered me, too, an' Joel never could explain," began Mrs. Palmer, nervously.

Just at that minute Star happened to think of the other daughter.

Nell Palmer had seated herself in a corner of the room, and was plaiting her hair.

She seemed to have no part in the scene whatsoever.

"A cold-blooded flirt," muttered Pendleton, as he and Star started out again, to see if there were signs of any more trouble.

"She's more than that, or I'm mistaken," was the old detective's answer. "I'll never leave Joel Palmer with that girl on the premises. There's something about her that makes me suspicious."

"Let's have a look at that rascal down by the fodder houses," said Pendleton, quickly. "He's been here some time; came the day after we did, in fact—I fancied for a time that she was in love with the fellow!"

"Bosh! The girl is a fool—come on!" was Star's answer.

A minute later they were exploring the pockets of a rough coat worn by Three-Toed Charlie.

There was nothing to be found but a plug of tobacco and a bundle of letters.

Star carried the letters to a lantern hanging on the stable door and read them.

As he opened the first one he gave a low whistle.

"Cracky! The girl is worse than I thought; hear this!" he said, softly; then putting his back against the stable, he read the letter, which ran as follows:

If the girl tells the truth there should be five thousand worth of nuggets. Will be back at midnight. See to it that the stables are unlocked, and be sure and locate the bag! Hang the tender-feet! They're not Pinkerton men this time. We've left those fellows in the lurch and can do the job nicely. If anything goes wrong it's for you to give the warning.

The letter was signed "Jesse James," in the outlaw's bold scrawl, and as it incriminated the girl, Star kept it in his possession.

Star changed his mind about going on at once when he read this letter. There was no doubt in his mind but that the remainder of the horse-thief gang would worry Jesse James so long as they knew the gold was in his possession, and even if he hadn't known this, he was in no condition to follow the outlaw immediately.

Pendleton and Horton were all right, but Star preferred his own chums to his rivals, and Stacy's condition was worrying him a little.

It was a busy night, both for the men and women.

They buried the dead and nursed the living, and day-break saw the ranch looking as forlorn as if a cyclone had swept over it. All of the best horses were gone, there was not a trace of the gold to be found, and the yard looked



like a slaughter house where the blood had flowed so freely.

Nell Palmer puzzled the detectives by the indifference of her manner.

After breakfast she stole up to her room, on the second floor of the ranch house, and Dick Pendleton was detailed to keep a watch on her movements.

Joel Palmer's position was not an enviable one.

He was a prisoner in his own house, and by her persistent questioning his wife finally heard of the nuggets.

The only thing his family did not know was that he had committed a murder.

Lent was doing nicely, but Stacy was still unconscious.

At noon that day they thought he was dying, and in the excitement Pendleton relaxed his vigilance.

Stacy revived later, and Alice Palmer went to call her sister.

There was no reply.

Pendleton waited for nothing, but dashed up the stairs, finding evidence that the girl had leaped from her window.

When Star ordered the punchers to look for her, they stared at each other, and one or two went so far as to resent it.

"She's in league with the James gang, and she must be found!" said the detective, finally. "I have a letter from Jesse James in my pocket this minute that proves that she told the gang about the bag of nuggets!"

Joel Palmer's eyes flashed, and Mrs. Palmer gasped in horror, but Alice seemed prepared for the terrible information.

An hour later the search ended, with no results.

The girl had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her.

This occurrence changed Star's plans completely.

In less than ten minutes he had outlined a different arrangement. Jed Ford and Coon Spiler, another puncher, were sent ten miles for the sheriff, who came posthaste, with a posse of lanky punchers.

"Reckon ye air a leetle too old an' slow fer yer job, Wiggins," was Pete Sanders' greeting, as he saw the official. "Hyar Jess James an' er crew of cutthroats air ridin' fast an' loose over the country, an' I 'low yer settin' at home er skinnin' wildcats, ain't yer?"

The sheriff blustered, but he had to take the rebuke.

The fact that Jesse James was in his territory upset him terribly.

He took Joel Palmer into custody after a short interview with Star, and started back to the jail, Jed Ford choosing a fresh mount and making the journey again, to be sure that his employer was locked up securely.

When Jed returned, at dusk, he reported traces of the two outlaw gangs, who seemed to be making tracks toward a certain spot in the foothills over in Trinity county.

"Thar's tracks of ther stallion clean to Eel River," he said. "Ther critter's limpin' er leetle, but I 'low he's full er grit. An' hanged ef he ain't got ter be, with thet thar rascal Fink Punbly arter him! Reckon Fink's dead sot on gittin' thet thar bag, so ef we start at moonrise thar's a chance ter be in at ther finish!"

Star stared at the fellow while he was talking, and then looked at Tracy, but at that minute Alice Palmer came up and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Leave Pete Sanders and Coon with me, and your friend will be safe," she said, softly, at the same time showing the detective a revolver that she was carrying in her pocket.

Star gave her a sharp look, and saw that he could trust her.

She had set her little white teeth defiantly, and her eyes were flashing. Mrs. Palmer was as pale as a ghost, but she had the same spirit as her daughter, and the thought that Joel had deceived her helped her to keep her composure.

"Can you swear by Coon" asked Star, with a glance at the stalwart cowboy.

Alice flushed slightly, but her lids did not waver as she answered:

"Coon will do as I say. There is nothing to fear. I shall lock the doors, and Coon must look after the live stock. It will take all the rest to fight those robbers."

Star hated to leave her so poorly protected, but he realized the truth of her words, for they numbered only a dozen, and the two gangs together would make up more than that number.

Horses were secured during the next hour, and at nine that night the posse set out, Star and Pendleton in the lead, with the punchers following, and Ray, with a Winchester repeater, bringing up the rear.

The outlaws' tracks were followed easily, and the men made out the prints of no less than ten horses, some



fresher than others, which showed that all had not been in a bunch together.

"Reckon now Jess was ahead," Jed Ford stated at the first inspection; "the stallion's tracks are 'most covered in some places. Them thar 'Twilight' fellers air chasin' Jess! They won't give up ther chase, nuther, not so long as they smell the thar bag of yaller!"

Star pricked up his ears at this remark.

He had been so busy during the day that he had overlooked Jed's remark of the previous evening. Slowing up a little, he rode by the cowboy's side, and tried to study his face in the moonlight.

"So that's the Twilight gang, is it?" he asked, in a low voice. "Well, they're a bad lot, Jed Ford! How does it happen that you are so friendly with them?"

"Used to be one on 'em!" was the answer, with a little chuckle; "an', snakes alive! what critters we did swipe! Haw! haw! I reckonter er critter we stole down in Southern Indiany! It was ther purtiest piece of hossflesh yer ever clapped eyes on!"

The fellow roared with laughter at the recollection, and Star made a mental soliloquy.

"Honest, by thunder! The fellow thinks there's no harm in stealing! I'll try and sound him on the subject of murder."

"Were you with Palmer when he stole that bag, Jed Ford?" he asked, abruptly.

"Cuss my heart, no! Cussed ef I knew he hed ther stuff!" was the prompt answer. "I 'low I helped ter stock up ther ranch, but Joel allus 'lowed ther beasts were left fer him ter sell. I reckoned he got his share when ther critters was disposed of! Consarn ther old dog, fer er liar an' a murderer!"

"That's just what he is! What's more, his victim's daughter lives at Blocksburgh," said the detective. "She's as smart as a peach, and as poor as poverty!"

The men growled out a few curses, and Star knew he had their sympathy. He intended to restore what he could of that gold to its rightful owner, and with these brave fellows to help him, the act looked possible.

They moved rapidly at first, as the moon enabled them to see a good distance ahead of them, but before Eel River was reached it had grown dark and cloudy, and there was some difficulty in following the tracks of the outlaws where the ground was rocky.

The detectives had taken pains to disguise themselves as completely as possible, and Star had proven himself an artist in this direction.

He had copied Pete Sanders as far as was possible, and it would have taken an eagle eye to tell him from the old fellow in the darkness. The men examined their weapons from time to time, and rode for miles without speaking.

An hour after midnight they reached the bank of Eel River, and halted in a level spot to hold a consultation.

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

Five minutes later Star crossed the river alone to do a little reconnoitering.

Jed was of the opinion that all of the tracks led from the river toward the foothills, and gave it as his theory that the horse thieves had followed close on the heels of the James gang.

"I'll decide that in a jiffy! No use you fellows coming over until we know for sure," the detective remarked, as he urged his horse into the narrow stream of water.

The men busied themselves lighting matches and closely inspecting the almost innumerable hoofprints, and just as Star reached the opposite bank Ray made a discovery.

"A mule, by thunder! And laden, at that! Look here, partners!" he called, excitedly.

Star had just scrambled out upon a level bank overgrown with low bushes, and turned his head to hear what his friends were saying, when crack! went a revolver, and his horse dropped under him.

The next instant there was the swish of a rope, and the noose of a lariat dropped around his neck, cutting off his wind and nearly choking him.

Ray let out a yell, and the posse dashed into the water, but it was fully three minutes before the opposite bank was reached, on account of the horses becoming excited.

When they did gain the bank, Star was nowhere to be seen.

His horse lay dead where it had fallen, and there was a trail of broken bushes, which, because of the darkness, the eye could not follow.

"After them! Yonder clump of green trees is their hiding-place, no doubt!" he yelled, as he caught a glimpse of dense foliage a hundred yards distant.



They plunged ahead, scanning the bushes as they went, but when the gum trees were reached the trail ended completely.

"It's sure death to go in there, boys!" called Horton, warningly. "One rascal behind those trees is as good as a dozen out of it! We must surround this spot and wait until morning!"

Horton spoke louder than he thought, and his words were overheard by some one who was lurking in the thickest bunch of trees, and then Jesse James, the outlaw, gave out a low chuckle.

"Ha! ha! They'll have their labor for their pains!" he muttered under his breath. "Reckon I'm not fool enough to stay here 'til morning! Curse the luck! To think of my roping old Pete Sanders! He's seventy if he's a day! Jumping sandhills, but he's gritty!"

He looked down at the man that he had been jerking over the bushes, and then actually bent and loosened his shirt collar a little.

"I'll give him a chance for his life, even if the old sinner was chasing me," he chuckled, as he rolled up the lariat; then, helping himself to the pistol in Star's belt, he turned and stole like an Indian through the thick foliage among the gum trees.

He had hardly covered a rod when the detective began to gasp.

A minute later he drew a long breath, and staggered to his feet, leaning against the tree to collect his senses.

"A bad choke, but not fatal! Now, Jesse James, beware!" was the thought that flashed through his mind, then, reaching for the knife that was in his bootleg, the detective crept stealthily after the clever outlaw.

If Star had known that his friends were within call, he would not have spoken then, for he was filled to overflowing with a desire for vengeance.

So long as Jesse James thought he was a detective he was ready to commit murder, so his mercy to the supposed old man did not count for anything.

After a half-an-hour of this stealthy trailing, Star began to wonder how far the clump of trees extended, then it suddenly occurred to him that Jesse James was cutting circles.

"Well, I'll be hanged! Now, what's his game?" he thought, as he paused for breath. "I'll bet the rascal has lost his way. He's looking for some path to get him out of this wilderness!"

There had not been a sound, for the space covered by the trees was much larger than he had at first figured, and when he suddenly heard a faint rustle, he stood like a statue. A second later there was a dark form between two trees exactly in front of him, then the outline seemed to drop to all fours and crawl off through the underbrush.

Star made his way to the two trees, and then dropped to the ground also. He placed his knife between his teeth, and crept on without so much as moving a leaf, and after a minute he heard the outlaw before him.

Another sound reached his ear at exactly the same minute.

It was the unmistakable murmur of running water, and Star knew it must be a brook running into Eel River.

He crept on steadily, with nothing to impede his purpose, for the ground was perfectly smooth, and the bushes made an arch above him.

"A natural path, and one that Jess is familiar with," he thought, as he suddenly saw the dull glow of the water.

He put his head out of the bushes and looked down the stream.

Jesse James was wading along in apparent unconcern, not fifty feet ahead of him, and Star groaned in agony as he thought of his revolver.

The opposite bank of the brook was also thickly wooded, and when the detective finally ventured to renew the chase he was amazed to see no sky above him, and only the dense blackness of trees and bushes before him.

"This grove must extend back for miles," he thought; yet, when he had followed the brook an hour, he suddenly emerged into the open, with a full quarter of a mile of water of some kind spreading out before him.

Jesse James was already swimming across this lake, and Star slid into the water as noiselessly as possible. When he arrived at the opposite bank there was not a sign of his quarry. The detective examined both the ground and the bushes, but although he had seen the outlaw land, the tracks had ended completely.

Morning was beginning to break, and the detective was in a dangerous position.

He was completely lost, so far as the points of the compass went, and had not the vaguest idea which way to go to seek his companions.

He sat down under the thick shade and meditated a minute, then, as a peculiar sound reached his ear, he sprang to his feet noiselessly.



"A jackass, by thunder! There's no mistaking that sound!" he muttered.

Creeping ahead fifty feet, he came to a high rock, which rose so steeply from the ground that it looked like an enormous tower or monument.

Behind this he was sure he could hear low voices.

Lying flat on his stomach, he wriggled halfway around it like a serpent, and was repaid by hearing these cheerful statements in the voice of the fiend that he had been so patiently following:

"The curs are near! There's only a mile between us! Let them attack us here, and we'll feed the wildcats with their carcasses! Hang the sleuthhounds! The Twilight gang are babies compared with them!"

"We've done them up before! Haw! haw! Thet thar scrimmage at ther ranch was hot work, hey, cap'n!"

These words were spoken in another familiar voice, and Star knew that Jesse had at least one of his old crew with him.

"We've got the stuff, thanks to the beauty yonder! Ha! ha! You helped us well, my pretty! Now, what do you want for a reward? A girdle of shiners, or a husband?" asked Jesse James, gaily.

Star held his breath, for he knew what was coming.

It was no surprise when Nell Palmer's voice retorted:

"I want you to keep your promise, Jesse James!" she said, quickly. "You said you'd take me to 'Frisco and make me a lady! The puncher, your agent, promised me that, and you agreed! You must do it to pay for my helping with the nuggets!"

Her voice showed a trace of fear, and Star could tell that she was frightened, but he could hardly believe his ears when Jesse James responded:

"You shall have your wish, pretty one! Jesse James never breaks his word! If we escape these sleuths, you shall be in 'Frisco this time a week hence, and I will then give you a share of your father's nuggets!"

"Bob Lindsay's, yer mean, cap'n," broke in the other voice again. "Joel Palmer murdered Bob and stole the nuggets!"

There was a shriek of horror, which Star knew was genuine, and then Jesse James tried to soothe the young woman.

"Ha! ha! Don't mind him, beauty! There's no harm in what your father did! The 'end justifies the means'; you've heard that, haven't you?"

"Oh, it can't be true! Father is bad, but he isn't so bad as that!" shrieked the girl, hysterically.

The outlaw's voice changed in an instant, and Star was sure that he heard him shake her.

"Hush!" he ordered, sternly. "Do you want to bring our enemies here? I left old Pete Sanders in the woods yonder, and the fellow sneaked away! If you bring him here with your yells I'll drown you in the lake yonder!"

There was a choking sound, as if the girl was trying to smother her sobs, and then another voice made Star almost jump to his feet in astonishment.

"Pete Sanders is too cussed fresh fer an old plug! He'd orter to be called down an' sot back er leetle! Ther way he was kiyutin' round ther ranch yisterday mornin' jest arter your call, Jess! Haw! haw! Yer'd orter have throttled ther old sinner, pardner!"

The speaker was Corrigan, the fellow who now called himself Jim Fifer. This explained to Star why the fellow had left so suddenly when the detective called him to account for his actions.

A movement behind the rock showed that the men had been sitting, and Star felt the cold chills run up his spine at the thought of falling into their clutches.

If he only had his revolver there might be some chance, but a knife was of very little use in the face of a pistol muzzle.

He held his breath until the men had moved around a little and the smell of smoke was wafted to his nostrils.

The outlaws were about to brew a cup of coffee, and after Star's night of tramping and swimming he envied them their opportunity.

A moment later the conversation was resumed, and another voice made Star even more anxious.

"Bob Fields, by the eternals! he whispered, as he heard the last speaker; then the shrewd detective began to do a little hard thinking.

Jesse James was cruel and merciless, there was no gain-saying that. He would murder a detective in cold blood and relish the job, for he looked upon all men of that profession as natural enemies.

Corrigan, or Jim Fifer, was a treacherous brute, that money could buy.

Unfortunately, Star had very little cash on hand, while Jesse James had nearly five thousand dollars in nuggets.

The third man, Bill Bolton, was a brother of the fa-



mous "Buck," and as cruel as a wolf when under the eye of his captain.

But this last man, Bob Fields, was another proposition.

He hated Jesse James with a deadly hatred, and Star knew that he was posing as his friend merely to get an opportunity to kill him.

There were others who were doing the same, the Ford boys among the number, but Fields was the bitterest of them all, and perhaps the most cunning.

Instantly the detective began planning how he could get a word with Fields without the rest of the outlaws knowing it.

He lay still and thought it over while the four men were eating, and Nell Palmer washed the tin cups, which seemed to be all the dishes in their possession.

The sound of a sharp blow after all had been quiet a minute was followed by a coarse laugh, and Jesse James seemed to be changing his position under the shadow of the boulder.

"Serves you right, Jim Fifer! Now let the gal alone!" said the outlaw, sleepily. "Watch the camp, Bob Fields! I've got to have rest—besides, I'm as wet as a chunk of seaweed from all that swimming."

"What time 'll we start, Jess?" asked Bob Fields, indifferently.

"As soon as the sun gets above the trees! Lie down here, my girl, where I can protect you! Ha! ha! No harm must come to the little Nellie! She's bound for 'Frisco to be a lady!"

There was another laugh, and then Bill Bolton spoke uneasily:

"No danger of them sleuths tracking us hyar, is thar, Jess?"

"Sleep with one eye open, if you're afraid," was the answer. "That's what Bob is staying awake for—to look out for the sleuthhounds!"

This ended the conversation, and Star drew a long breath.

In five minutes every man behind the rock would be asleep except Fields, and he was beginning to wonder if he dared to risk it.

"The girl will let out a yell the minute she sees me," he thought. "And, of course, that will wake Jess, and I can see my finish! Fields won't help me kill Jess for fear of losing his own game! Hang the fellow! He's got his eye on the government's ten thousand!"

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE PLOT AGAINST THE OUTLAW.

Star waited until he was sure he heard the three men snoring, and then began to wriggle back around the rock.

His object was to get some distance from the rock before attracting the attention of Bob Fields, and to do this he was obliged to move with great caution.

Once he snapped a twig and was sure he heard Fields start, but as all was quiet in a moment he went on slowly.

Suddenly from the trees on the other side of the rock came the braying of the donkey, and this was followed by the neighing of horses and the unmistakable snort of the stallion.

Star stopped short and lay flat on the ground under the shadow of the rock.

He knew these sounds would awaken Jess, and, moreover, they portended something. Somebody was stealing up on the camp—or it might be an animal.

"What is it?" roared Jesse James, who had wakened in an instant.

"A critter of some kind! I'll go and see!" was the answer, and Star could hear Fields move away at a swift pace through the bushes.

"Ther wench ain't bolted, has she, Jess?" asked Bill Bolton, sleepily.

"Reckon it's the sleuthhounds! Better git er move on, cap'n!" growled Corrigan.

"Shut up, the two of you! What is it, Bob?" roared the outlaw, savagely.

"It's the mule! Ther cussed beast has rolled and tore ther bag! Haw! Haw! Thar's gold all over the bushes. Jess! It would break your heart if yer was ter see ther nuggets!"

There was a sullen roar, and the three men leaped to their feet, and Star heard them cursing like pirates as they tore their way through the bushes.

As quick as thought, the detective rose to his feet and darted around the rock.

Just as he had expected, Nell Palmer still sat on the ground.

She was wrapped in a shawl and her back was toward him.

He gave a quick glance at the spot, which was only a small clearing, and then, clapping his hand over the girl's mouth, he lifted her bodily and darted back the way he came, straight on into the bushes.



He could hear the men still cursing as he went, and just as he staggered and fell under the girl's weight, there was the crack of a pistol from the scene of conflict.

Star did not remove his hand from the girl's mouth until several minutes had passed. When he did so he found that she had no idea of shrieking.

"Hello, Pete Sanders!" she said, in a low tone. "I'm glad you've found me! Don't make a sound! Those men are terrible!"

In the semi-darkness among the trees she had taken him for her father's oldest puncher, and Star drew a breath of relief when he saw that she was tractable.

The voices of the men were still plainly discernible, and they could hear Jesse James cursing like a fiend and fairly bellowing his orders.

"That'll teach you a lesson, Bill Corrigan, I'm thinking!" he roared. "Curse you! What right have you got to be slipping the stuff in your pockets?"

"I helped ter steal it, Jess! It's mine as much as it is yourn!" answered Corrigan, sullenly.

"Ha! ha! That's the biggest mistake you ever made, you fool! I'm the captain of this gang, and I pay my men fair and square! God help them if I catch 'em trying to help themselves! Now, then, tie your handkerchief over that hole in your wrist and look after the stallion! You'll do the drudgery after this, to pay for your antics!" retorted the outlaw.

"Have you a horse, Pete?" whispered Nell Palmer at just this stage of the game. "If you have, we'd better go! They'll be moving in a minute!"

Star shook his head. He would not trust himself to answer.

He was afraid his voice might not resemble Pete Sanders'.

"Then I'll steal one and meet you at the edge of the lake," went on the girl. "Oh, I wish I hadn't done it, Pete! I'm afraid of Jesse James. He's as cruel as a tiger, and his men are demons!"

Star still remained silent, but he held on to the girl. He was not quite sure of her loyalty to him.

After a little more cursing about the thief, Jesse James began calling for Miss Palmer.

It was plain that he thought she had been frightened by the scene and was hiding near by until the storm blew over.

"Where are you, beauty? Come and finish your nap; no one shall harm you!" he called.

"Shall I answer?" asked Miss Palmer, under her breath. "If I don't I'm afraid he'll come and look for me!"

The words were hardly out of her mouth before Jesse James roared out sternly:

"Go and find the wench, Bob Fields, and bring her back! She'll lose herself if she don't look out."

Fields started to reconnoitre.

As he neared the spot where Star and the girl were hidden the detective whispered to Nell Palmer to attract Fields' attention, and at the same time make signs to him to say nothing of having found her.

Then he left her where she was, and crept a few feet farther back into the bushes.

Whether the girl would do as he had told her or not he could not tell, but he was beginning to think she was really frightened, and if this was the case, there was some chance of his plan succeeding.

The three men behind the rock were quiet now, and Fields was taking his time about examining the bushes.

It was a trifle lighter in the forest now, but still too dark and hazy to see anything clearly.

Suddenly Fields uttered a sharp exclamation, that made Star's heart stand still.

He knew intuitively that the fellow had discovered his tracks, and waited with bated breath to see what he would do about it.

"What is it?" called Jesse James, without, apparently, raising his head.

Fields gave a harsh laugh, and then answered promptly:

"By gum! I took thar tree trunk fer a bear snoozin' in ther bushes! Reckon thar's somethin' wrong with ther whisky, Jess! Haw! haw! As if thar was bears in this hyar section of ther country!"

"You're a fool, Bob Fields!" muttered the outlaw, and Star drew a breath of relief.

This lie of Fields' had reassured him of one thing, and that was that the fellow hated Jess as bitterly as ever, and was keeping his own counsel as far as possible.

Fields now came straight to the bushes behind which Miss Palmer was hidden, and the girl rose quickly and made a gesture for him to say nothing.

Fields nodded his head, and a grin spread over his features, but his quick eyes were darting here and there among the bushes.

Turning his head, he bellowed back a word to the outlaw in the hope of allaying any suspicions that Jess might be harboring.

"I've found her tracks, cap'n! I'll overhaul her in a minute! She's makin' fer the lake, so she can't be far distant!"

"Treat her right, Bob Fields, or I'll put a bullet through you," was the answer. "Bring her back, and be quick about it! It's time we were going!"

Fields had reached Miss Palmer, when Star sprang out of the bushes and, lighting like a cat on the fellow's back, grabbed him by the windpipe.



Fields made a desperate struggle, but the detective hung on, and after a minute he had forced him down to the ground, and Miss Palmer had relieved him of a brace of pistols. Then, while Star choked him so that he could not cry out, Miss Palmer calmly cocked one of the weapons and held it to his temple.

She was greatly surprised when Star knocked the weapon from her hand, and then, with one hand, gagged Fields with a big bandana.

"Now, then, I'll explain, Bob Fields," he began, in a low voice. "I'm a friend, not an enemy, in spite of my actions. I'm after Jesse James, the rascal who enticed this girl away, and I've got the bulge on you merely to force you to help me."

Fields could not answer, but he stared at his captor, and Miss Palmer picked up the weapon and put it in her pocket.

"He's dad's man, Pete Sanders! He's going to take me back home," she began, in a faint voice.

Star paid no attention to her words, but went on with his explanation.

"There's a reward of ten thousand dollars for that rascal's head, as you well know, Bob Fields; now, then, will you help me kill that scamp and save this girl? We can do it as easy as not."

Fields winked his eyes—it was all he could do—and as soon as Star read his expression he removed the bandana.

"Sh! Talk easy! Jess has ears like a cat!" warned Fields. "You bet I'll help to rid the world of that scamp, but, as easy as it looks, it won't be so easy to do it!"

"Is Corrigan crippled?" asked Star, again.

"His right wrist is broke, but he kin shoot left-handed—but Corrigan don't count! It's that cuss, Bill Bolton! He's wuss than Buck when it comes ter a murder!"

"Can't we creep around the rocks and surprise 'em?" asked Star.

Fields would have laughed if he had dared, but as it was he could only twist his features.

"As soon ketch er weasel asleep as Jess," he said, softly. "No, pard, our play is ter steal away an' lead Jess er chase! I 'low he'll foller ther gal consider'ble distance! Thar's no use in er fa'r an' squar' fight with them thar rascals. Ther odds are ag'in us, an' even if they warn't, you're too old er man ter be much use in'er scrap, I reckon!"

He eyed Star keenly as he spoke, and the detective smiled.

"Don't be too sure! I'm not as old as I look," he said, quickly. "Guess again, old man, and see if you can't place me! You and I have met before when the conditions were different!"

"You mean when I was against Jess, an' not fer him,"

said the outlaw, quickly; "then, I reckon I smell a rat! You're Will Star, the detective!"

Star got his hand over Miss Palmer's mouth before she could cry out, and then gave them both a hurried explanation.

"If I was sure the girl wasn't treacherous," he added, at the last, but as her eyes filled with tears he almost regretted having said it.

"I'm not! I swear I'm not! I'll go back home with you, if you will take me!" she said, sharply; "I was a fool to believe that lying puncher, but, oh, I did so hate the ranch, and I wanted to be a lady!"

"The girl is all right. She's afraid of Jess and ther hull lot of us!" said Fields, slowly; then it occurred to him to be getting a move on—Jesse James was not of the kind to do much waiting.

Star gave him back one of his pistols and kept the other, and as they started softly through the bushes, Jesse James shouted, angrily:

"Bob! Where the devil are you, Bob? You've had time to go to the lake a dozen times over!"

Fields was something of a ventriloquist, and, throwing his voice a hundred yards farther ahead, he answered, faintly:

"Coming, Jess! Curse ther gal! She's as balky as a government mule! Come and help me lug her, if you're in a hurry!"

Then he darted behind a tree, and Star and Miss Palmer hid in the bushes, and all waited to see if the outlaw would accept the invitation. Their pistols and knives were ready, and Jesse James would receive no mercy at their hands.

If he came he would be shot down like the cur that he was. There would be no dishonor in killing such a wretch from ambush.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### JESSE JAMES' FLASK OF POISON.

In less than a minute the detective heard the men behind the rocks stirring, and knew that they were engaged in another hot altercation.

"You'll do as I say, or I'll let daylight through you, Bill Corrigan!" they heard Jesse James roar; then there was an ominous silence, after which the dry twigs began snapping.

"He's coming, Fields! Shoot him down like a dog!" whispered Star, softly.

"Pull yer own trigger at ther same time, pard, so ther deal will be even," was the outlaw's low answer.

Miss Palmer knelt in the bushes and covered her face with a shawl, and a moment later a burly form loomed up behind them.



"It's Jess! Thank God, his career is ended!" thought Star, as he leaned forward, with his finger upon the trigger.

"Queer, the cuss is carryin' his weapon in his left hand," thought Fields, and just then he heard Star's weapon speak, and dropped his hammer.

The man who was approaching fell like a log, but neither Fields nor Star moved from their positions.

"Hold on, pard!" warned Fields, "Bill and the Irishman will be hyar in a jiffy. We may as well clean up the batch while we are about it!"

"It'll be a trio well disposed of! Don't miss, for God's sake!" growled Star. Then both men hastily reloaded the empty chamber in their weapons.

Another minute passed, and they could hear the stallion snorting.

Then Bill Bolton's voice could be heard cursing at the mule. Then there was another crackling of twigs, and all was silent.

"By G—d! They didn't have ther courage ter face ther music! Let's chase ther babies, pard!" cried Fields, darting out from his cover.

"We must hide Jess' body, first! We'll need it to get the government's money!" was Star's answer, as he sprang into the space between the bushes and the body.

A howl of rage followed that made Nell Palmer jump to her feet, and Bob Fields began cursing like a maniac.

"It ain't Jess! It's Corrigan! D—n the fellow!" roared Star. "He's tricked us again, Bob, by the eternals!"

Fields could not speak for a minute, except in curses, but he bent over the dead man and verified Star's statements.

Corrigan, dressed in Jesse James' clothing, was lying dead at their feet, while the tricky outlaw, on the back of the stallion, was rapidly putting the trees and bushes between them.

"There's no use to follow! The scamps have horses and we haven't," said Star, dolefully. "Here's an extra pistol, Fields, and cartridges, if you need them. Now, then, lead the way, if you can, out of these infernal bushes."

Fields helped himself to the ammunition from Corrigan's belt.

It took over an hour to reach the lake, and when they arrived there they saw traces of the stallion.

Jess and Bill Bolton had crossed with the golden-laden donkey between them.

"Where'd they get that beast?" asked Star, as he saw the tracks.

Nell Palmer hung her head, so Bob Fields answered:

"The beast was in the lots, and the girl used him to get away on. Of course, Jess put the bag on ther critter as

soon as he saw him. Reckon they won't get on so fast with that pesky balkin' machine between 'em!"

"They'll go too fast for us, all right! Now, if the boys will only head them off!" said Star, quickly.

Fields gave him a sharp look.

"So you ain't alone, then?" he said, quickly.

Star thought it best to be honest, and explained where he had left the others.

"We'll go around ther lake; no use wettin' ther gal," said Fields, when he finished.

They began the march, taking turns in carrying the girl, and letting her walk now and then when the shore was free of bushes.

At high noon they were exactly opposite where they had started, and Fields was getting his bearings by means of a pocket compass.

"This hyar means er straight cut 'cross country ter Blocksburgh," he said, reflectively. "Reckon, now, Jess will go in thet thar direction. Thar's er stage frum Blocksburgh ter Sayer thet he'd like ter hev er look at. We'll hev ter be keerful not to overlook ther rascal."

"If we only had horses," said Star, who was nearly exhausted.

Bob Fields looked back over his shoulder and winked.

"Leave thet thar ter me, pard! I know er thing er two erbout this hyar section," he said, curtly.

It was nothing new to see courage in a robber, but, as a rule, the road agents of the West were not given to sentiment.

They had lost the tracks of the James gang in their journey around the lake, but as they emerged from the woods and struck out across the open country Bob Fields cast his eagle glance ahead and discerned something.

"There's a crossroad ahead, an' thar looks ter be tracks," he said, pointing.

Nell dropped to the ground and sat quietly while the men inspected the road and made a few rather uncomfortable discoveries.

"It's Jess, all right! There's the stallion's big hoof," began Star.

"Thar's ther mule an' t'other hoss; now, then, what mout these hyar tracks mean?" asked Fields, pointing to each as he mentioned them.

"Jess has been met by some one. They came from opposite directions," said Star, after a minute.

"Jumpin' sandhills! I've got it!" cried the outlaw, suddenly. "Ther cuss thet's met him is Frank James, his brother, an' I 'low, now, Frank has got reinforcements with him!"

"Then our work will be doubly hard," said Star, between set teeth. "Frank is as quick at the trigger as Jess, every bit, and as for the rest of the gang, you know



them as well as I do. They're the biggest crew of cut-throats this side of the Rockies!"

"I'd orter know 'em, I've been with 'em long enough," said Fields, sullenly. "Yer kin bet I'd er quit long ago if I'd had er chance ter git even! Jess owes me er fortune, an' I mean ter git it, or else I'll take satisfaction out of his hide, by the eternals!"

"That's easier said than done, as we've just discovered," growled Star; "but which is the road to Blocksburch, partner?"

Fields nodded toward the right, and the dreary march was resumed, with Miss Palmer walking the best of the three since her nap on Fields' shoulder. Star was tired out, and stumbled over something.

He was exceedingly tired, and had been dragging his feet, or he would hardly have struck such a very small object.

"See here, Fields. One of the rascals has dropped his flask!" he called out.

Fields turned, and took the bottle in his hand.

It held about a pint, and was half-covered with leather.

"Thet thar is ther property of his job lots, ther king of handits!" he exclaimed, promptly. "Haw! haw! Hyar's where we git er drink at Jess James' expense! I'm thirsty as er duck, an' I 'low yer to be, too, pardner!"

He returned the flask to Star, who promptly uncorked it, then, noticing the girls pale cheeks, he urged her to partake of it.

"A swallow will do you good! You are nearly worn out!" he began.

Fields glanced around, and saw a tiny brook near them, and, pulling a tin cup from his pocket, he filled it with water.

Star poured in some of the liquor, and the girl drank it off. Then Star put the flask to his own lips and swallowed a mouthful.

The next second there was a cry from Miss Palmer, and her face turned as pale as death.

At the same time Star made an effort to eject the liquor he had taken.

"What the devil!" began Fields.

"Poison! There's no whisky about it!" snapped Star.

Fields ran over to the brook and got another cup of water, which he forced Miss Palmer to swallow, in spite of her agony.

Star managed to rid herself of what he had swallowed, but there was an internal griping that was very uncomfortable.

Then they both turned their attention to the relief of the girl, and after an hour of hard work she was out of danger.

"It was ther water that saved her, I reckon," said Fields. "Ef she'd er swallowed ther stuff straight, 'twould

hev killed her, sure as shootin'! Thet thar's another trick of Jesse James that nuther on us will forgit easy, I reckon."

"I should say not!" growled Star. "How the deuce did the rascal know we would be right behind him? That stuff might have been swallowed by an innocent person!"

"I 'low it was," said Fields, with another look at the girl.

Star walked up to a little knoll, and took a wider view of the country.

His eyes caught a glimpse of something in the distance.

"Quick! Make for the rocks yonder! There's some one coming!" he yelled. "It may be friends and it may be enemies! This isn't any time to be taking chances!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### JESSE JAMES IN WOMAN'S ATTIRE.

Fields raised Nell Palmer in his arms and made a dash for the rocks, with Star following.

They were no more than hidden before a group of horsemen came clattering over the knoll.

Star stood perfectly still, and listened until he heard their voices, then let out a whoop that awakened the echoes.

"Hello! Whoop! Hi there! Hold on, Ray! Run away and leave us, and I'll blow your brains out!"

There was a sudden halt, and a chorus of yells, and as Star emerged into full sight he was promptly surrounded by his late companions.

Bob Fields came out, while they were yelling, leading Nell Palmer by the hand, and the yelling was increased until it resembled pandemonium.

Star quieted them enough, finally, to tell his story, and hasty plans were laid to accomplish certain purposes.

Nell Palmer was sent home, with two of the punchers as escorts, and then, although he hated to do it, Bob Fields joined forces with those who were to go in an opposite direction.

After that the march was resumed, Pendleton and Jed Ford walking for a while to let the tired men enjoy the horses, and at the very next stretch of pasture land they came across a herd of horses.

"Look out, boys! No monkey-shinés!" warned Pendleton, who was riding in the lead. "There's a dozen men on guard around those beasts! What the deuce can it mean? They look as if they had been in a scrimmage!"

Star galloped ahead and waved his hat to the herdsman.

They answered with a grim salute, and then every man of them raised a rifle to his shoulder.

"Halt!"



The order was given by a burly fellow, and Star motioned for his men to heed it, at the same time stopping abruptly.

"Who be yer?" asked the man, without lowering his weapon. "Give an account of yerself, stranger. We've had fightin' enough for ther present!"

"We're detectives and ranchmen on the track of Jesse James and the Twilight gang!" responded Star, promptly. "They've stole a lot of horses from Joel Palmer, at Dark Cañon, and there's five thousand in nuggets between 'em that belongs over in Blocksburgh!"

"Reckon yer'll hev ter move faster, then, strangers," said the man, as he lowered his weapon. "We've hed er run-in with them thar Twilights, and licked 'em, too, you bet! Snakes! So thet thar must hev been Jess that we jest tackled, pardners!"

He turned to his men as he spoke, and they all lowered their weapons, so Star moved nearer, talking as rapidly as possible.

Ten minutes later the party had all the information that the herdsmen could give them, and were also in possession of two extra horses.

Jesse James had escaped their rifles, after trying in vain to steal a horse, and he and all but one of his party had galloped away toward the mountains.

The herdsmen exhibited the remaining man with a great deal of pride.

He had been shot just as he leaped to the bare back of one of the horses, and was lying, "dead as a door nail," behind a clump of bushes.

"It's Apache Al, a halfbreed, and a robber to the core," said Star, as he looked at him. Then the dicker for the horses was made, and the party galloped on toward Blocksburgh.

They reached the little settlement an hour before daylight, and put up their horses in a good-natured rancher's stable.

After a breakfast and two hours' rest the entire group sauntered out, and passed themselves off in the town as a lot of miners who were traveling West to find employment.

"Thet thar's queer, now," was the reply that greeted Star's remark to that effect, and Hot Foot Jones, the jolly ranchman, looked over a tumbler of whisky at the detective.

"What's queer about it?" asked Star.

"Reckon biz in Blocksburgh is lookin' up," went on the ranchman. "Thar's work enough hyarbouts, but not jest in this hyar section, leastwise not enough ter go round ther hull two bunches!"

"What the deuce do you mean?" asked Pendleton, quickly.

"Haw! haw! Reckon, now, yer didn't meet er dozen

er so big fellers thet struck ther town last night jest afore lamplightin', did yer?" was the answer.

The detectives looked at each other, and then Star urged his host to enjoy his whisky.

When the bottle was empty he was sure that "Hot Foot" would feel more like talking.

"They was past hyar last night! Reckon they've moseyed on ter ther Cutthroat ranch! Thet thar's ther place where strangers goes mostly!" went on the ranchman.

"Polly the Lark's place, by ther eternal!" blurted out Jed Ford. "Reckon, now, we'd best hev er look at thet thar wench! I 'low, now, she's ther purtiest critter this hyar side of ther Sierras!"

"Polly's er coker, an' no mistake!" chuckled the ranchman, as he opened another bottle, "but you'd orter clap an eye on ther gal she's got with her! Snakes! She's ther snappiest critter thet ever wore petticoats! Thar won't be er hull heart left in ther bunch when yer've seen thet thar wench ten minutes!"

"Who is she?" asked Horton, who was getting interested.

Hot Foot gulped down his whisky before he answered: "She's old Bob Lindsay's daughter, Lib. Bob was at ther Comstock an' made his pile, but he never come back—not farther than Humboldt county. What become of him no one knew, but he was tracked most ter Dark Cañon. I allus 'lowed he was murdered an' robbed, an' Polly hyar has took mercy on ther orphan. She'll lead Lib er life, no doubt, but the ranch is er shelter fer ther poor innercent!"

"A fine shelter, if the James gang is being harbored there," muttered Star, under his breath.

A few minutes later he and Ray sauntered out.

They were going to look up the authorities of Blocksburgh and plan with them how to entrap the outlaw.

Not a sign of the outlaw gang was seen during the day, and, beyond admitting that she had accommodated a dozen men and horses with a night's lodging, the owner of Cutthroat ranch would say absolutely nothing.

Polly Fleming, the ranchwoman, had received her *sobriquet* from her voice. She could sing like a lark, and was always singing.

She had been in California many years, and was as shrewd as a lawyer. She owned two thousand acres and seven hundred head of cattle, and ran her ranch as cleverly as any man in that section.

That she should harbor an outlaw gang would not have been believed by the authorities if Star had not been able to prove his assertions.

Spies were sent to the ranch, but they could find out nothing.

The cowboys about the place were about their usual



duties, and Polly and Lib Lindsay were busy around the ranch house.

Nevertheless, at twelve o'clock that night the house was surrounded.

There was a posse of half-a-hundred, not counting the detectives' party.

During the height of the excitement Polly appeared at the door.

She was told that she must allow the sheriff and his men to enter, as Jesse James and his gang of cutthroats were known to be there.

"This hyar's ther second time in ther history of ther ranch thet we've come on sech an errand," exclaimed the sheriff. "When Polly first started ther ranch thar was er party of cutthroats stopped hyar! I reckon she knowed one on 'em, somehow, 'cause she shielded ther cusses an' they got away! Thet thar give ther ranch its name, an' it's stuck like er porous plaster!"

While the official was talking Polly had disappeared for a minute, and when she returned there was some one with her.

"It's Lib! Reckon they're goin' ter get out while we ransack," chuckled the sheriff; "as if we'd hurt ther purty critters!"

Then he ordered his men not to molest the women, but to scour the premises thoroughly for the party of outlaws.

Star took the lead, and the crowd surged around the house, while the two tall, dignified figures picked their way across the yard and turned down the street that led to the village.

"Hanged if I ain't going to have one look at the belle of Blocksburgh," thought Horton, as he watched them; then, instead of following the men, he reined his horse toward the women.

There was a yell from the sheriff at that minute, and pistols began to crack, but Horton only urged his horse ahead, and then wheeled around suddenly.

He had headed off the two, who were fleeing from the ranch, and as they were now face to face he leaned over and stared at them.

Instantly there was a flash and a report.

A bullet from a good-sized weapon struck the detective squarely in the shoulder.

He had just time to see the face of Jesse James peering at him from under a thick, green veil, then, with a yell to Star, he pitched headlong from the saddle.

In less than a second the two outlaws were in his place and galloping toward the mountains. They were half-a-mile away before Star reached him.

Horton was unable to speak for several minutes, which increased the distance to a mile, and when he did speak Star could hardly believe him.

Two members of the gang had been found in the ranch house and riddled, and the posse was scattering over the

lots on a wild chase after three more, then some one yelled that they had found the women.

This verified Horton's tale, and the detectives gave up in despair.

Once more the famous bandits had succeeded in outwitting them.

The outlaws that were caught were promptly jailed, but they were none of them well known, so there was not much glory.

At daybreak Star found the bag of nuggets, or what was left of it.

The James boys had carried what they could, but there were about two thousand dollars worth left, and it was their pleasure later on to make it over to Lib Lindsay.

Polly the Lark was tried for complicity with the outlaws, but when it was found that she was the wife of one of them, the authorities forced her to sell her ranch and get out of California.

Lib Lindsay, who was a really pretty girl, nursed Horton back to health, and before the detective left Blocksburgh they were engaged to be married.

Stacy and Lent joined Star at Burnt ranch, in Trinity county, a few days later, and reported that Nell Palmer had been returned safely to her mother.

Fields listened to the news in silence, but there was a happy look on his face, which was changed later to a frown when the detectives urged him to chase the outlaw gang still farther.

Jesse James was followed, in a desultory way, for the first two or three days after his disappearance in Polly the Lark's clothing, but neither he nor Frank were heard of definitely for some time after.

Which of the outlaws was Polly's husband no one cared to find out. He disappeared during the scrimmage, so there was no use conjecturing.

Joel Palmer was hung a few months later, and Jed Ford and Pete Sanders took care of the ranch for the widow.

Star waited until Horton was out of danger, and then stole a march on the two rival detectives by getting out with his chums one night and leaving them to act their own pleasure in the matter of following the outlaws.

"They're all-fired brave fellows, and our friends," he said, honestly, "but business is business, and I hate to divide honors. If we catch Jesse James the glory goes to the Pinkerton agency. We can't afford to forget our duty to our employer!"

Lent seconded the statement, and Stacy and Ray nodded approval. They could be good fellows and good lovers, but, above all, they were good detectives.

Jesse James was still alive, and cutting his bloody swath as wide as ever, and it was for them to pursue the rascal to the ends of the earth, if necessary.

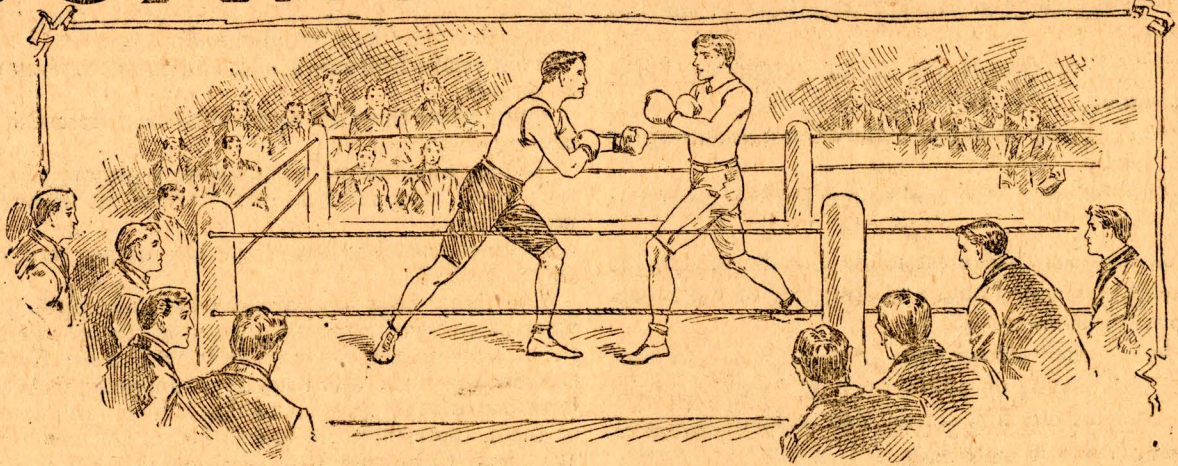
Star had accomplished his object in restoring some part of the stolen gold, but he would never rest until that other conquest was accomplished—he must rid the world of Jesse James, the outlaw.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 44, will contain "Jesse James' Spy; or, Corraling a Whole Town," Jesse James' biggest exploit, boys. He never made a bigger haul than he did on this occasion. He came near capture, too, but escaped. Read it, boys, in next week's issue.



# BOXING CONTEST



The new contest has opened up at a lively gait. The first bunch of entries came in so swiftly that it nearly knocked the editor out. Keep it up, boys. From the way things have started it looks as if this contest was going to be a record breaker. Remember that old proverb about the early bird and the worm. Bear in mind, also, that the neatness and legibility of your contribution will also count for something. Of course we give the prize to the best description of a boxing bout; but if two contributors are equally good, the boy whose writing is the neatest and most legible is the winner.

Now, boys, get ready for excitement! Here are a few of the best out of the big host of early arrivals.

## A Hard-Won Victory.

(By Walter Sneed, Texas.)

When Alfred Smith entered the boxing tournament of the Hercules Athletic Club of Houston, Texas, he had little hope of coming out a winner.

He had considerable skill as a boxer, but many of the contestants were older and stronger boys, and it looked to Alfred as if he had not much of a chance.

In his first two bouts, however, to his intense surprise, he easily outpointed his opponents.

His third bout, however, which was to be the last of the tournament, was harder.

His opponent was Charles Eastmond, a boy who had easily defeated all the other contestants save Alfred. He was several years older than Alfred, much heavier and capable of hitting an exceedingly powerful blow.

When the evening for this final contest arrived Alfred was decidedly nervous.

"I have no chance to win," he said to his friend, James Gordon, who acted as his second. "Eastmond is so much taller than I am, and his arms are so long that I cannot hope to touch him."

"Keep up a good heart, Alf," said James, slapping him on the back. "Keep cool and you'll beat him. He's almost sure to lose his temper and then you will have him where you want him. He'll fight wildly and give you plenty of openings."

Alf had plenty of courage. He thought over his friend's words and decided to follow his advice.

When the bell rang for the bout to commence he found his big opponent with a confident smile on his face.

Eastmond opened matters by making a wild rush at Alf. The smaller boy, although he avoided almost every blow, was driven back, and finally fell to his knees.

Every one thought that he was already defeated. When he arose, however, he wore the same confident smile. Eastmond rushed again. This time Alf side-stepped cleverly and planted his left fist on his opponent's chin.

The big boy straightened up and nearly fell backward while the spectators yelled with excitement.

Now came Alf's chance. Eastmond was too much startled and shaken up to defend himself. The smaller boy darted in and rained blow after blow on his head and breast.

Blinded and bewildered, Eastmond staggered around the ring trying in vain to avoid the stinging blows of his opponent. Alf followed up his advantage closely. Jab after jab landed on some part of Eastmond's face or body.

When the bell rang at the conclusion of the round the big boy was so weak that he had to be helped to his corner. He refused to continue the fight, admitting that he had been defeated, and Alf now holds the medal awarded to the champion boxer.

## The Boxer and the Bully.

(By Ralph Graves, New York.)

"Get out of my way, curse yer, or I'll run yer down!" This was the cry of a brawny truck driver as he guided his team around a sharp turn. He raised his whip threateningly at the terrified old man he addressed, who was doing his best to avoid the plunging horses.



"Drop that whip and pull up your horses!" This sharp command came from the lips of a slender youth, scarcely more than a boy, who stood on the curbstone watching the incident.

The driver pulled in his horses and glared at him. "Who'll make me?" he cried.

"I will," said the young man. The next moment the burly driver had dismounted and was advancing at the youth with clinched fist.

Suddenly he lowered his head and rushed. Bystanders turned away in horror. They thought that the young man would be killed surely.

"Crack!"

Something had landed hard on the bully's jaw, and he was stretched full length on the pavement, while his opponent, unhurt, stood calmly waiting for him to arise.

He did not have to wait long.

With a howl of rage, the gigantic driver rose to his feet and rushed at him.

Crack! Crack!

The young man's body stepped quickly to one side, as the driver rushed, and his fists shot out like cannon balls.

Again the bully was stretched on the ground. He arose slowly and went over to his team amid the cheers of the spectators.

## A Contest for \$20,000.

(By W. Burchill, Ala.)

It was midnight, and Will Speers, the youngest of the clerks, was the only one left in the bank.

He had been working later than usual at the books and was just preparing to leave.

Suddenly he heard a noise.

It came from the front office. It sounded as though some one were trying to force in the door. Then came creaking, as of the door opening. Will Speers sprang to his feet.

A moment later he was looking into the muzzle of two revolvers in the hands of two men who had entered the cashier's room.

They were tall and broad, and wore black masks.

"Give us the combination of the safe or die," said the foremost of the two.

What was Will to do?

He knew that the two men facing him were desperate characters and would not hesitate to take his life, yet he could not give them the combination of the safe. It contained \$20,000. He must be faithful to his employers.

"I give you three minutes," said the desperado who had spoken before.

Slowly the big clock ticked out sixty seconds. Will was still hesitating.

Suddenly an idea came to him.

"We will box for that money," said Will.

"Box for it!" exclaimed both desperadoes.

"Yes," said Will. "I will trust to your honor. I will write the combination of the safe on a piece of paper and hand it to one of you. He will act as referee, while I

box with the other. I have a set of gloves in the office here. If I am defeated you can read the combination. If I win you must tear it up and leave."

"But the noise will attract attention," said the smaller of the two cracksmen.

"We are where no one can hear us," said Will.

"It's a bargain," said both burglars. They might not have agreed so readily had they known that Will was the champion boxer of the little Western town in which he lived.

They laid their revolvers aside while Will threw off his coat and vest, after writing something on a piece of paper and handing it to the smaller man. The larger man stripped for action, and Will drew forth the gloves from beneath his desk.

There was a clear space at one end of the room and Will and the burglar faced each other there.

"Time!" cried the referee, and Will stepped forward and landed lightly on his opponent's face.

The burglar retaliated, and the bout was on thick and fast.

Will found that his opponent was no mean boxer. He sprang about with the agility of a cat, and kept Will busy avoiding his blows.

At the end of the round both were panting.

"Time!" called the referee, and again they faced each other.

This time Will was more careful.

With the agility of a panther, he danced about his antagonist. Now he would step in to land a stinging blow. Now he would cleverly slip aside to avoid a rush.

At length the burglar gave Will his opportunity. After a rush, he dropped his hands for a moment. Will ran in and swung with his right.

The burglar tottered and fell.

The bout was over.

Will, after tearing up the paper, aided the referee in helping the other cracksmen out. Then he saw the two mount the horses they had left at the door and gallop swiftly.

He had saved the \$20,000.

## A Winning Punch.

(By Harry Wilkins, Ga.)

Jim Hickey and Joe Grimes were the best boxers in the street in which they lived.

They met one afternoon to decide the championship in the back yard of the house in which I lived.

Several other boys were there to watch the contests. I acted as referee.

Jim was the taller of the two, but Joe was stouter and stronger.

He was twelve years old while Jim was thirteen. At first Jim had the best of it.

His long arms gave him the advantage. He struck Joe easily and Joe could not reach him at all.

In the third round, however, he made a vicious jab at Joe. Joe ducked it cleverly. Then his right fist shot up and landed on Jim's nose so hard that the blood flowed.

I stopped the contest and declared Joe the victor.



# TALES OF HUNTING AND TRAPPING.

## CROCKETT AND HIS COUGAR.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

Years ago the name of David Crockett was known from one end of the Union to the other. Born in what was then the State of North Carolina, in 1786, his parents removed to Tennessee, when he was about five years of age, and that State justly claims him as her son.

At fifteen years he did not know the alphabet; yet thus early in youth he displayed the shrewdness, tact and perseverance which made him so distinguished in after life. He married at an early age, when he was so poor that he could scarcely call a dollar his own; and making little headway on his farm, he emigrated West, into Lincoln County, where, with his helpmeet and his two sons, he settled down to the stern business of life.

The surrounding country being mostly woods, rich in the different kinds of game, he had full opportunity to exercise his love for hunting, and while yet a young man, became noted for his remarkable skill in the use of the rifle. When the Creek War broke out he enlisted immediately after the massacre of Fort Mimms. He did good service as a scout and common soldier, and the authentic exploits which he performed while thus engaged would of themselves form a volume. At the close of the war he returned to his family unharmed. Two years after his wife died, and this was an action sorely felt by the honest-hearted hunter. The touching death-bed scene remained indelibly stamped upon his memory, and he never recurred to it in after life without great emotion.

Being left with three children, he did his duty as a father to them, and a few years later married a widow lady, with two children, her husband having been killed in the Creek War. The marriage proved a happy one in all respects.

Some years afterward he removed to Shoal Creek, where he settled, and entered upon the second phase of his life, and the one which really gave him his great fame. He was chosen magistrate, and assumed his duties with a determination to be just, and to execute justice at all hazards. When, as it may well be supposed, he united this resolve with a total ignorance of all technical law, it may be safely believed that his administration was characterized by justice in the true sense of the word.

When a complaint was made, instead of taking the trouble to issue a warrant, he simply instructed the constable to "catch that chap, dead or alive," and it rarely happened that the culprit escaped. Not one of his judgments was ever appealed from.

In 1821 he was elected to the legislature. While a magistrate he had applied himself assiduously, and had acquired the rudiments of an education. About this time also he was elected colonel.

In 1823 he was elected a second time to the legislature, and became so popular that in 1824 he was nominated for Congress, but was defeated by two votes, due,

there is reason to believe, to fraud. His friends, nothing discouraged, hoisted his name again, and although he had two wealthy and talented opponents, and he was extremely poor, he was elected by a majority of over three thousand votes.

When the Tennessee backwoodsman took his seat in Congress he created quite an excitement. His blunt honesty, eccentric humor and native wit, made him known to all. At one of the "receptions" held at the White House, in accordance with the fashion of the times, as he presented himself, the servant announced him in the words:

"Room for Colonel Crockett of Tennessee!"

"Colonel Crockett makes room for himself," called out the hunter, as he strode in among the notables.

We have not space to dwell upon his memorable career in Congress, his defeat by means of intrigue, his second election, his tour through the Northern States, in 1834, his reception in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and other cities, which it seemed all vied with each other to do him honor.

But he had opposed Jackson, and when he came again to run for Congress, despite his universal personal popularity, he was defeated, and by the aid of a lavish use of money his opponent was elected.

Crockett felt the disappointment keenly, as he had counted confidently upon being re-elected, and with a longing for new scenes and triumphs, he determined to emigrate to Texas, believing that by identifying himself with the young State, he would again reach the position from which he was unjustly thrust.

Texas being then distracted by a remorseless war, he deemed it best to leave his family behind him until peace should come. We may pass briefly beyond the main incident we propose to give in this sketch, and say that he made his way to the Alamo, where he joined Colonel Travis and Bowie and the handful of Mexicans in their defense against Santa Anna, who had a force of more than twenty times their number. The defense lasted nearly twelve days, until Santa Anna, rendered desperate by two disastrous repulses, poured his command over the walls of the fort. Even then the gallant Texans fought until but six remained, when Colonel Crockett surrendered. General Castrillon asked Santa Anna what should be done with them. The latter replied: "Why do you bring them to me? Have I not told you how to dispose of them?" The words were scarcely uttered when the officers plunged their swords in the hearts of the defenseless prisoners. Crockett, seeing the treachery, drew his bowie knife and made a spring toward Santa Anna, but before he could reach him was slain. Had the distance between the two been a little less, Santa Anna would not have lived thereafter.

On his way to Texas, Crockett was accompanied by several friends, from whom on one occasion he became separated, having been led away by the excitement of a



buffalo hunt. His cunning mustang feigned complete exhaustion when he reached the bank of a river, and, removing his saddle, Crockett left him to shift for himself.

This mishap occurred just at nightfall, and the adventurer, observing a large tree that had been blown down, concluded its exuberant branches would afford him a comfortable shelter for the night. He began beating among them to select the proper place, when he was startled by hearing a growl close at hand. Turning his head, he saw, less than ten feet from him, a Mexican cougar glaring at him. The animal was crouching, ready for the spring, and Crockett, fully feeling his critical position, raised his rifle and discharged it. As the smoke cleared from his gun, he expected to see the animal in its last struggle; but instead the brute only shook himself and gave vent to another deeper and more ominous growl. The ball had struck his forehead and glanced off, merely stunning him, without inflicting any injury.

Crockett, seeing that he would not have time to reload his piece, clubbed it and stepped back. At the same moment the lithe animal made a spring in the air and lit at his very feet. The hunter brought down the stock of his gun with all the power at his command upon the brute's head, but it made no impression, except, perhaps, to render him more furious than he was before, and the cougar again sprang at him.

The gun was of no further avail, and, throwing it from him, Crockett drew his knife and made ready for close quarters. As the cougar came up he struck at him with the knife, and at the same moment found his teeth fastened in his arm. The hunter thrust his knife into the side of the beast, when the latter loosened his hold, and the two separated for a moment. But it was only for a moment. The infuriated beast turned again to the attack. Crockett was fearful that the contest would last until he was exhausted, and he now turned all his efforts toward blinding the brute. He therefore struck at his eyes, but only bruised his nose.

While slowly walking backward, Crockett caught his heel, and, as he fell upon his back, the cougar dropped squarely upon him and fastened his teeth in his thigh. As he felt the long fangs enter his flesh, he struck the animal again and again, but it was at such disadvantage that he inflicted little injury.

The prolonged struggle had brought the combatants to the bank of the river, and the hunter, seeing the water below him, did his utmost to hurl his foe into it; but the latter clung so tenaciously to him that he saw if one went over, it would only be when the other did.

Crockett desperately drove his knife into the side of the brute, but it possessed remarkable tenacity of life, and sank its teeth deeper and deeper into the flesh, until the gallant hunter began to believe his end was really at hand.

Summoning all the strength of which he was master, he began a fearful struggle with the cougar, determined, at all hazards, to force him over the river bank, and he succeeded finally in getting him to the very edge, where for a few moments, the two lay in such delicate equipoise, that a strong gust of wind would have toppled them over.

Crockett seemed completely exhausted, and the animal

was in the same predicament. Thus they lay, panting, with the hurried breath of each mingling together. In a moment the hunter had regained his strength, and, with a sudden effort, he broke the balance. Both rolled over and dropped upon the very edge of the water, most fortunately the hunter falling on top in such a manner that the neck of the cougar offered an invitation to the knife. It was instantly sank to the heart, and the beast, with a few struggles, rolled over and died.

Crockett shortly after rejoined his companions, and, together, they made their way to the Alamo, here they all fell, bravely fighting for the young republic.

## LIVES OF FAMOUS MEN.

This contest was over some weeks ago, as you all know. All of you are at work in the new contest. We received so many good contributions in the contest, however, that we had not space to print one hundredth part of them. A great many were almost good enough to win prizes. We want to give the writers of some of the best of them the satisfaction of seeing their contributions in print. Here are a few.

### Funston's Deed.

(By J. Walsh, Wash.)

On a hot, tropical night the commanding general of the invincible armies of the United States in the Philippines, standing in the uneasy shadow of a verdant palm, received the news that the leader of the enemy, the subtle, slippery and influential Aguinaldo, was but a score of miles away, hidden in the impenetrable shades of the distant hills.

"I must have Funston's advice," he muttered. He turned to an orderly. "I wish to see General Funston," he said. The attache dashed away, and returned speedily a few steps in the rear of the famous officer.

The leader held a long conference with his invaluable aid. Many plans were suggested and abandoned. Finally Funston suggested one which for daring and audacity has seldom been rivaled in authentic annals. Funston and a few soldiers were to pretend to be the captives of a band of friendly natives, who were to take them in bonds to Aguinaldo. At a propitious moment they were to be released, and the rebel chief was to be seized and made captive in turn.

Funston and his men left the city secretly at night, for half the population were Filipino spies. Quickly, noiselessly, they passed the outlying farms. The country was dark, silent, deserted. The shadowy figures sped on into the dark shadows of the trees marking the spot where they were to meet the friendly natives.

They are early.

They huddle together while the distant church bells toll the hour. Twelve o'clock. They started. The chief led the way, presenting to the eyes of his men a sturdy, decisive figure. Over the band hovered the silence which precede dangerous deeds.

As they neared the hiding-place of Aguinaldo, Funston and his men were bound and carried as captives to the rebel headquarters.



At a propitious moment the Americans were released and armed. With pointed guns, they called on the rebels to surrender.

A flash of fire and a loud report startled the night. The rebels rushed hither and thither in an endeavor to escape.

"Onto them, men, we must hold them!" shouted Funston. There was a shock as bodies met. Strange curses rent the air. Hoarse ejaculations were heard. Sharp commands.

Shot followed shot irregularly.

With an irresistible sweep, the Americans attacked the rebels, and after a struggle took them prisoners.

### General Ben Butler.

(By N. V. Neil, Long Island.)

General Butler was born in Deerfield, N. H., November 5, 1818. After a preparatory school education he entered the institution at Waterville, Me., then known as Waterville College, graduating with credit in 1838. He pursued the study of law, and was admitted to the bar in 1840. From the first he took a deep interest in politics, and an active part in political work. He was a staunch Democrat, and was elected by that party in 1853 as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and was elected to the State Senate in 1859.

At the time of the President's call for troops in 1861 Butler held the rank of Brigadier-General of Militia. On the 16th of May he was made Major-General and placed in command of Fort Monroe.

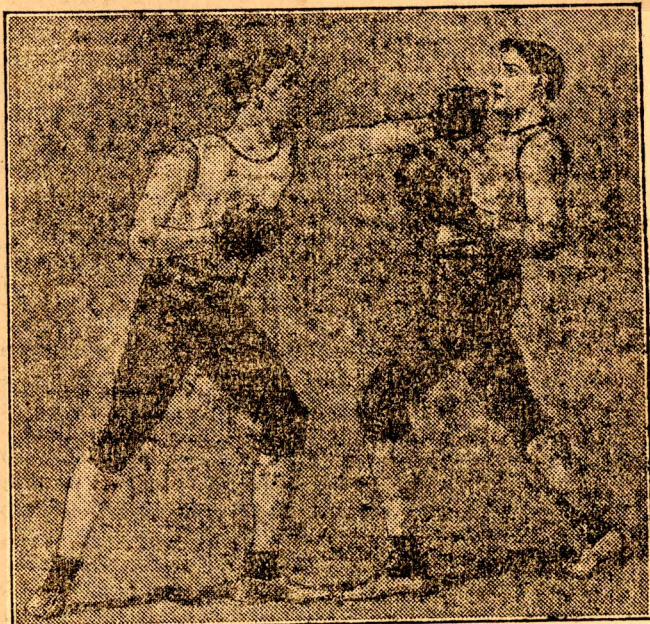
During the summer he was engaged in active service in capturing Forts Hatteras and Clark in August. An expedition was planned at this time for the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi to which he was assigned.

The military force consisted of 15,000 men and reached Ship Island April 17, 1862.

This expedition was designed first and foremost for reducing the defense of New Orleans and capturing the city in conjunction with the fleet of Commodore Porter, assisted by that of Farragut. On the 25th the city was compelled to surrender and Butler took possession on May 1st. He aroused intense resentment among the inhabitants as well as the people of the South generally, on account of his rigorous measures, especially for the hanging of Wm. Mumford for taking down the United States flag from the mint building, and for his "Order No. 28," to prevent women from insulting soldiers. For these actions he was proclaimed an outlaw by Jefferson Davis in December, 1862.

A more just cause for resentment, however, was his seizure of \$800,000 deposited in the office of the Dutch consul. His ground for doing this was as he stated that the Confederate arms and supplies were to be purchased with it. At the protest of all foreign consuls, the Government looked into the matter and directed Butler to return the money. On December 16, 1862, General Butler was recalled and placed in command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. He remained in this Department hardly a year, and was sent in October, 1864, to New York City with a force to insure peace during the intense excitement of the election. General Butler's conduct generally met with considerable disapproval, and his military judgment was severely censured.

## Boxing Contest Now Running



### SEVENTEEN PRIZES

TWO **SPALDING PUNCHING BAGS** COMPLETE FIRST-CLASS **OUTFIT**

FIFTEEN **SPALDING BOXING GLOVES** SETS OF

The two boys who write the best stories will each receive a Spalding "Expert" Punching Bag, made of finest selected Napa tan leather. The workmanship is the same as in the Fitzsimmons special bag. Double-stitched, welted seams, re-inforced one-piece top. Best quality Para rubber bladder. An extremely durable and lively bag, and carefully selected before packing. Each bag complete in box with bladder, rubber cord for floor and rope for ceiling attachment. The four next best stories will win for their writers sets of Spalding regulation 5 oz. boxing gloves.

#### TWO PAIRS OF GLOVES TO EACH SET.

Made after the Corbett pattern of soft craven tan leather, well-padded, with elastic wrist bands.

There will be eleven prizes in the third class. Eleven sets of two pair of Spalding boxing gloves. Regular pattern, made of light-colored soft tanned leather, well-padded, elastic wristbands. These bags and gloves are

*The Best that can be obtained anywhere. They are well worth trying for.*

### HOW TO GET THEM

Think of any exciting boxing bout you have witnessed or participated in. Sit down and write as good a description of it as you know how. Make it lively. Throw in all the upper cuts and half arm jolts, and do it in five hundred words or less.

Every boy who has ever seen a boxing contest has a chance to capture one of the prizes. The contest may be between boys or men, beginners or well-known amateurs. If you should not win a prize you stand a good chance of seeing your story and name in print, anyway.

To become a contestant you must cut out the Boxing Contest Coupon on this page, fill it out properly, and send it to JESSE JAMES WEEKLY, 233 William Street, New York City, together with your article.

No contribution without this coupon will be considered. Come along, boys, and make things hum.

**THIS CONTEST CLOSSES MAY 1, 1902.**

#### COUPON. JESSE JAMES WEEKLY BOXING CONTEST

Date.....

Name.....

City or Town.....

State.....



# JESSE JAMES STORIES.

(LARGE SIZE.)

The Best Stories Published of the Famous Western Outlaw.

- 7—Jesse James, Rube Burrows & Co.
- 8—Jesse James' Daring Deed; or, The Raid on the Pine Ridge Jail.
- 9—Jesse James at the Throttle; or, The Hold-Up at Dead Man's Ditch.
- 10—Jesse James' Double; or, The Man from Missouri.
- 11—Jesse James Among the Moonshiners; or, The Train Robbers' Trail in Kentucky.
- 12—Jesse James' Close Call; or, The Outlaw's Last Rally in Southern Wyoming.
- 13—Jesse James in Chicago; or, The Bandit King's Bold Play.
- 14—Jesse James in New Orleans; or, The Man in the Black Domino.
- 15—Jesse James' Signal Code; or, The Outlaw Gang's Desperate Strategy.
- 16—Jesse James on the Mississippi; or, The Duel at Midnight.
- 17—Jesse James' Cave; or, The Secret of the Dead.
- 18—The James Boys in St. Louis; or, The Mysteries of a Great City.
- 19—Jesse James at Bay; or, The Train Robbers' Trail.
- 20—Jesse James in Disguise; or, The Missouri Outlaw as a Showman.
- 21—Jesse James' Feud with the Elkins Gang; or, The Bandit's Revenge.
- 22—Jesse James' Chase Through Tennessee; or, Tracked by Bloodhounds.
- 23—Jesse James In Deadwood; or, The Ghost of Shadow Gulch.
- 24—Jesse James' Deal in Dead Valley; or, At Odds of Fifty to One.
- 25—Jesse James on the Trail for Revenge; or, The Outlaw's Oath.
- 26—Jesse James' Kidnaping Plot; or, The Massacre at Weldon's.
- 27—Jesse James Among the Mormons; or, Condemned to Death by the Saints.
- 28—Jesse James' Capture and Escape; or, Outwitting the Pancake Diggings Posse.
- 29—Jesse James' Hunt to Death; or, The Fate of the Outlaw Vasquez.
- 30—Jesse James' Escape From Cheyenne; or, In League with the Wyoming Regulators.
- 31—Jesse James' Rich Prize; or, The Battle at the Old Stone House.
- 32—Jesse James and His Ally, Polk Wells; or, An Errand of Life or Death.
- 33—Jesse James in New York; or, The Missing Millionaire.
- 34—Jesse James' Deal in Sacramento; or, Holding Up the Overland Express.
- 35—Jesse James Against the Record; or, Seven Hold-Ups in a Week.
- 36—Jesse James and the Woodford Raid; or, The Nervy Bandit Hard Pushed.
- 37—Jesse James' Narrowest Escape; or, Chased by a Desperate Band.
- 38—Jesse James and the Black Valise; or, Robber Against Robber.
- 39—The James Boys Driven to the Wall; or, The Three Lives of Wild Decatur.
- 40—Jesse James' Ruse; or, The Escape from "Lame Horse Settlement."
- 41—Jesse James in Mexico; or, Raiders of the Rio Grande.
- 42—Jesse James' Double Game; or, Golding, the Dandy Sport from Denver.
- 43—Jesse James Surrounded; or The Desperate Stand at Cutthroat Ranch.
- 44—Jesse James' Spy; or, Corraling a Whole Town.

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents a copy will bring them to you by mail, postpaid. STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 238 William Street, New York.



# 75 Solid Gold Watches

## GIVEN AWAY

Not Gold Filled Watches  
Not Gold Plated Watches

BUT ABSOLUTELY

## Solid Gold Watches

WARRANTED UNITED STATES ASSAY.

FULL PARTICULARS IN NUMBER 20,  
BOYS OF AMERICA.

---

Now Running in "Boys of America"  
*A Corking, Up-to-Date Story*

BY  
**FRANK MERRIWELL**

The Famous Yale Athlete.

Entitled . . .

The All-Star Athletic Club;

OR,

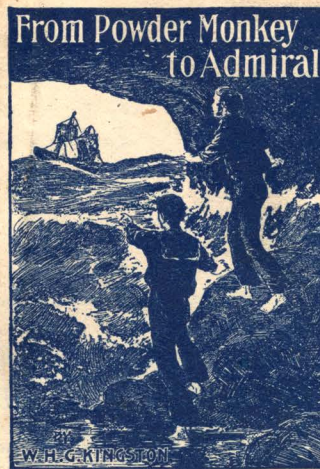
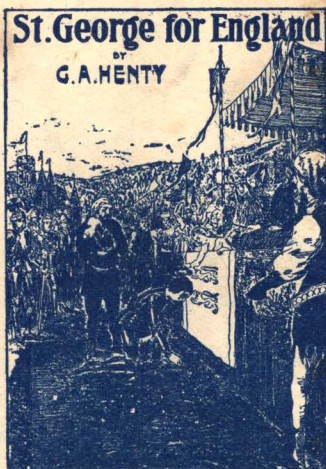
The Boys Who Couldn't Be Downed

---

NO BOY CAN AFFORD TO MISS THIS FASCINATING STORY.

The wonderful record of the All-Star Athletic Club, their bitter rivals, their battles on the ice, in the gymnasium, on the snow, in the rink, the plots of their enemies, etc., etc., are just a few of the features of this remarkable story, throbbing with enthusiasm and excitement. Don't miss No. 20, BOYS OF AMERICA, containing the opening installment of this great story.





THE BEST AND MOST FAMOUS BOOKS  
WRITTEN FOR BOYS ARE PUBLISHED IN

# THE MEDAL LIBRARY

*Price, 10 Cents. All Newsdealers*

These books are full size. Bound in handsome illuminated covers. The authors of the stories published in the Medal Library hold first place in the hearts of the youth of our land. Among the many writers found in this library may be mentioned the names of

OLIVER OPTIC  
HORATIO ALGER, JR.  
LIEUT. LOUNSBERRY  
GILBERT PATTEN  
LEON LEWIS

G. A. HENTY  
JAMES OTIS  
EDWARD S. ELLIS  
WM. MURRAY GRAYDON  
CAPT. MARRYAT

GEO. MANVILLE FENN  
ARTHUR SEWALL  
GORDON STABLES  
CUTHBERT BEDE  
MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

FRANK H. CONVERSE  
W. H. G. KINGSTON  
CAPT. MAYNE REID  
JULES VERNE  
BROOKS McCORMICK

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 238 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK

